

Vrrrrroom. Vette vs. Porsche vs. BMW

PAGE 51



E-gadgets that travel well

PAGE 22



Doctor visits—no waiting!

PAGE 13



Spin city: Washers you'll want

PAGE 36



AUGUST 2014 | CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

ConsumerReports®

AMERICA'S BEST FAST FOOD (AND THE WORST)



Surprise: Healthy choices

Yum! Juicy new burgers

Uh-oh. Big, bad calorie bombs

Experience the easy way to buy a car **AND** save.

This program offers guaranteed savings* off MSRP on new cars, so you know what you should be paying even before going to the dealership.

Our Build & Buy Program is easy to use:

1. Go online to research the car you want and see local dealer pricing information.
2. Request your Vehicle Certificate, which identifies you as a subscriber, so you receive all available incentives and special savings.
3. Take the Certificate to a participating dealer in your area who is committed to a great subscriber experience and drive away in your new car.

Subscribers who have used the Consumer Reports Build & Buy Car Buying Service have saved an average of \$2,919 off MSRP.**

So let the Consumer Reports Build & Buy Car Buying Service make your car buying experience memorable for all the right reasons. It's car buying made simple.

Benefit from the Consumer Reports® Build & Buy™ Program now.
Go to www.ConsumerReports.org/cr/carsavings614ss



*Guaranteed Savings not available in all states. In other states, a target price is provided. Guaranteed Savings may not be available on select models or trims. See site for details.

**Between 7/1/13 and 9/30/13, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented by TrueCar Certified Dealers to users of the Consumer Reports Build & Buy Car Buying Service, based on users who configured virtual vehicles and subsequently purchased a new vehicle of the same make and model listed on the certificate from Certified Dealers, was \$2,919. Your actual savings may vary. SERVICE NOT AVAILABLE IN CANADA.

Contents



THE FEATURES

15 \ AMERICA'S BEST & WORST FAST FOOD

Consumers want tastier food and more choice as they dine out, according to our latest survey.

RATINGS PAGE 21

22 \ GADGETS TO GO

Tablets, action cams, digital cameras, and more can help make your vacation travel fun and productive.

28 \ BACK-TO-SCHOOL BESTS

Great tablets and laptops for all ages.

30 \ TOP TECH SUPPORT

Apple and independent stores shine.

RATINGS PAGES 30-31

32 \ WHERE SHOULD YOU GO FOR HEART SURGERY?

Our Ratings of more than 400 hospitals will help you find the right one.

RATINGS PAGES 34-35

36 \ YOUR ULTIMATE LAUNDRY GUIDE

Find the best washer and dryer, or keep your old ones humming.

RATINGS PAGES 38-39

40 \ SUPER SUDS

When it comes to detergents, cheaper can be better.

RATINGS PAGE 42

**THE
HOT LIST**
TOP PRODUCTS IN
SIX CATEGORIES
PAGE 46



5 \ Ask our experts

5 \ Letters

6 \ Viewpoint

We need fair airfares.

6 \ From our president

Progress on food safety.

UP FRONT

7 \ Trends

What big media mergers mean to you.

The buzz on coffee drinks.

Should you buy a GM car?

Know when to toss food.

We test the Drain-FX.

Safe cookout tips.

Eating out? Chew on this!

12 \ Money

Passport to smarter spending abroad.

13 \ Health

What to expect when you use walk-in clinics.

14 \ Safety alerts

61 \ About Us

62 \ Index

63 \ Selling It

LAB TESTS

43 \ HD camcorders

These affordable models will capture the moment.

44 \ Coffeemaker

A combo unit misses the mark.

44 \ Printer smarts

Tips to help you use yours efficiently.

45 \ Portable A/Cs

Most units do a mediocre job of cooling.



CARS

49 \ News

Reality check on electric vehicle salesmanship.

51 \ Face-off

The Chevrolet Corvette vs. Porsche 911.

54 \ BMW M235i

55 \ Chevrolet SS

56 \ Subcompacts

Road tests of the Chevrolet Spark, Ford Fiesta, and Mitsubishi Mirage.



Check out our iPad app

Look for expanded Ratings, videos of road tests and lab tests, and interactive navigation. Now included with your paid magazine subscription.

ISSUE BY THE NUMBERS

What's the score?

86

Samsung
DV56H9100EG
electric dryer



25

Great Value
Naturals
laundry
detergent

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Notice something different?

We've been busy improving the look of Consumer Reports and want to know what you think. There will be additional changes in the coming months—but no change in our mission to protect consumers and empower their lives. We'd love to hear your feedback. Go to CRresearch.org/august14

COMING IN SEPTEMBER

Ultra HD televisions,
late-summer deals,
best ways to sell your stuff,
pod coffeemakers, and grills
and grill accessories.

CONSUMER REPORTS

We are the world's largest independent, nonprofit, 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.

org/lettertoeditor. **News tips and story ideas:** Go to ConsumerReports.org/tips. **E-mail submissions:** For Selling It go to ConsumerReports.org/magazine or call 800-666-5261. See page 63 for more details. **Subscription information:** Go to ConsumerReports.org/magazine or call 800-666-5261. See page 61 for more details.

Ratings We rate products using these symbols:

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor



ON YOUR MIND

Door prize

"Run Your Home from Your Phone" (June 2014) left off one item that is very useful. Many modern garage door openers can be opened and closed remotely from a cell phone or computer. They also can notify you by e-mail when someone opens or closes them. No more having to drive back home to make sure the door is really closed.

—Sue Kayton Menlo Park, CA

Added credit protection

"Guard Your Credit from Thieves" (June 2014) provided excellent credit protection information. Another proactive identity theft protection: Account holders at banks and credit unions can request to set up an account password to be used for account transactions.

—Robin Jacobs Sandy, OR

Green with envy

"Your Best Lawn Ever" (May 2014) did not mention the one truly "green" and lowest cost alternative: winter rye. Before I discovered it, the thin clay soil in my yard resisted everything but scraggly moss. Because it is an annual, I have to sow a new crop each fall, but I don't need to fertilize, water it, worry about shady areas, or reseed in the spring. Each crop (and its mulched cuttings) provides enough sustenance for the next.

—Hap White Williamsburg, PA

CORRECTION ON LEGAL SEA FOODS CLAM CHOWDER

An item in the June 2014 Selling It feature incorrectly implied that clams are missing from Legal Sea Foods' New England Clam Chowder. The item mistakenly relied on a food allergen label on the chowder container, although an ingredients section on outside packaging did list clams.



ASK OUR EXPERTS

Q. A recent report on chocolate bars refers to 'trained tasters.' Does that mean experts from the chocolate industry, experts not from the chocolate industry (such as a professional chef), or a staff meeting where someone said, 'OK, we're going to train you right now how to taste-test chocolate bars'?

—Glen Goldstein Narrowsburg, NY

We had our sensory panel taste the chocolate bars. Sensory panel members have been trained in general procedures of sensory analysis so that they can objectively evaluate the characteristics of products rather than giving their subjective opinions. Essentially, they are measuring instruments with calibrated palates (or other senses: touch, smell, hearing, vision). At the start of a project, the panel goes through additional training specific to the product being tested.

Q. I have been researching cars for my next purchase and would like to know how "predicted reliability" is calculated? I've researched autos that score well in most categories, but then predicted reliability receives a bad score.

—Art Forsha Lewisville, TX

Predicted reliability is calculated from the average used car verdict, based on the trouble spots reported by our survey respondents for the most recent three years for a given model. If the vehicle has been recently redesigned, only one or two years of data may be used for the calculation. For some newly redesigned 2014 models, we may use the model's previous history for the prediction.

Q. In "Store Safely" ("Point, Shoot & Share," June 2014), about computer storage on USB flash drives, you mention that those devices are not designed for long-term storage. I have completely replaced my CD backups with backups to USB flash drives, as I assumed that they were OK for long-term storage. I agree that they are easily lost or, with suitable neglect, can be damaged. However, I keep mine in a safe and only get the kind with a protective cover over the USB plug. What is the remaining risk?

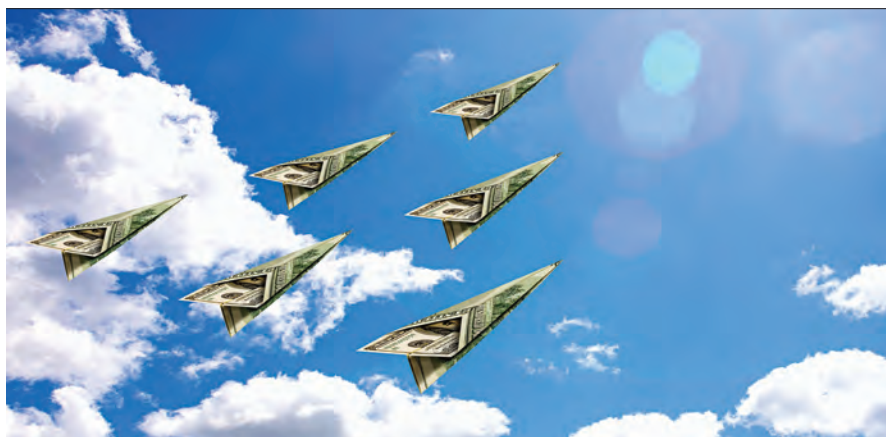
—John Barber West Chester, OH

The key reasons were pointed out in the article: Because USB flash drives are so small, they are easily lost or damaged—or even stolen—at which point all of your data is gone.

Q. I've seen paddle shifters in more vehicles these days, and I was wondering how much of a difference or benefit they are to the overall driving experience?

—Bob Buttaro San Diego

Paddle shifters allow the driver to quickly manually override the gear selection in an automatic transmission without taking his hands off the wheel. That can be a benefit if you need to use engine braking on a long, steep hill, or you can use the paddles to access more of the engine power in a spirited driving style. They mostly come on sports or sporty cars or trim lines that are more aimed at enthusiasts. For most people, they are a frivolous feature.



Unfair airfares

THE ISSUE It's becoming more and more difficult to determine the bottom-line cost of airline tickets because of the recent onslaught of fees, such as charges for carry-on baggage (thanks, Frontier Airlines!). Worse yet, a new bill in Congress would allow carriers to quote you ticket prices that are significantly lower than what you'll ultimately be charged.

OUR TAKE It's time to ground the ironically titled Transparent Airfares Act of 2014. The bill stipulates that mandatory taxes and fees levied by federal, state, and local governments, as well as airport authorities, wouldn't have to be disclosed until the

end of the booking process. Thankfully, the Department of Transportation proposed new rules in May that would force airlines to be more forthcoming. If finalized, carriers would have to disclose add-on fees for such services as checked baggage

at all points of sale, which we think is badly needed.

If transparency is really what the airline industry is after, we're all for it. For now, we'll keep fighting against its misleading actions. Check ConsumersUnion.org for updates.

Web watch

The Federal Communications Commission may allow Internet service providers to charge websites for preferential treatment, creating fast and slow lanes for Internet traffic. Companies with deep pockets would have to pay to upgrade Internet speeds, but scrappy start-ups may not be able to afford it. Before the FCC makes its decision, the agency wants to hear from you. E-mail your take to openinternet@fcc.gov. The agency will be accepting comments through the summer and hopes to have a final rule that incorporates the public response ready by the end of 2014.

\$20.8 billion

That's the estimated average amount spent on unneeded medical care in Massachusetts in 2012, according to the state's Health Policy Commission. Such spending often results in poorer outcomes. For advice on avoiding unnecessary care, go to ConsumerHealthChoices.org.

STATE LINES

Is Kickstarter safe?

In what is the first consumer-protection lawsuit involving crowdfunding, Washington's attorney general has taken action against a company that raised \$25,000 through Kickstarter but has failed to deliver anything to its backers.

Crowdfunding allows people to secure financing for their initiatives from a large pool of backers, often in exchange for incentives. In this case, consumers pledged funds to help print and market playing cards and other items featuring artwork by a Serbian artist. In turn, each donor would receive a deck of cards, the artist's sketches, or similar rewards—a promise that must be honored under Kickstarter's terms of use. (The site isn't part of the lawsuit.) But the company behind the project, Altius Management, hasn't delivered any rewards or refunds to its 810 backers, including at least 31 from Washington.

"Consumers need to be aware that crowdfunding is not without risk," said state Attorney General Bob Ferguson.



Yo, Joe!

The restaurants listed in "America's Best & Worst Fast Foods," on page 15, serve

everything from soup to nuts. But at some, one thing that you won't find is meat raised on antibiotics. As we note, Chipotle, Panera Bread, and a few small chains have moved away from that type of meat. Bravo and bon appétit!

Antibiotic overuse isn't limited to prescription pads. Eighty percent of all antibiotics sold in the U.S. are used on livestock, not to treat sick animals but to speed growth and prevent disease in the crowded, dirty conditions common on factory farms. That adds to the growing problem of antibiotic-resistant superbugs in humans. At least 23,000 people in the U.S. die each year from antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Consumer Reports has taken a strong stand on this issue, and consumers, schools, restaurants, and stores are also recognizing that their decisions have the power to improve the market. A growing number of hospitals are also phasing in meat raised without antibiotics, as they link the food they serve to their goal of improving health.

There has been no such commitment from Trader Joe's. That's surprising because the retailer, whose stores and products often rank high in our Ratings, is one of the nation's most progressive grocers. It is stocking more no-antibiotics meats—good, but not as strong as competitor Whole Foods, which has pledged to sell only meat raised without antibiotics.

It takes more than laws and regulations to change the marketplace; it takes consumers speaking up. More than 650,000 of you have petitioned Trader Joe's to stop carrying meat raised with antibiotics and to use its influence as a leader in healthy food to make us all safer. To learn more about our campaign, go to NotInMyFood.org.

Jim Guest
Jim Guest
President

Up Front



What big media mergers mean to you

IF YOU THINK your cable bill's high now, just wait. It could get even higher if the Comcast-Time Warner merger is approved. That's the opinion, anyway, of 74 percent of Americans surveyed by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. People also think the proposed merger, which was first announced in February, would result in fewer choices when it comes to providers of

pay TV and broadband Internet services, and most in the April 2014 national survey of 1,573 people oppose the merger altogether.

The Comcast-Time Warner announcement seems to have started a chain reaction of consolidation in the telecommunications industry. In May, AT&T announced its intention to buy satellite provider DirecTV for \$48.5 billion. All of the companies involved

have portrayed their mergers as beneficial for consumers, citing the prospects of accelerated deployment of new technologies, higher broadband speeds, and increased bargaining power with content providers.

But it's obvious from our survey that consumers themselves don't seem to see it that way. Only 12 percent of the public seems to believe that those types of large media mergers are good for the economy overall.

"AT&T's proposed takeover of DirecTV is just the latest attempt at consolidation in a marketplace where consumers are already saddled with lousy service and price hikes," says Delara Derakhshani, policy counsel for Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports. Consumers Union is working to stop the Comcast-Time Warner merger. Find out more at HearUsNow.org. Federal regulators are expected to rule on the Comcast-Time Warner merger by the end of the year. So stay tuned.

BY THE NUMBERS

All consumers are likely to pay more for cable and Internet.

74%

agree strongly or somewhat.

The merger will allow Comcast-Time Warner to operate more efficiently and lower prices for consumers.

16%

agree strongly or somewhat.

Large mergers like this tend to be good for the economy overall.

12%

agree strongly or somewhat.

The buzz on iced-coffee drinks

TIRED OF DROPPING \$4 to \$5 on a Mocha Frappuccino at Starbucks? We have some good news: The ready-to-drink options available at the supermarket are a lot easier on the wallet—and some of them are pretty tasty, too. Several of the brands we evaluated tout protein or lower-calorie content on their labels, but those claims don't always tell the whole story. Here's what we found from a close look at eight supermarket mocha coffee drinks:

The calories in these drinks—up to 180 in 9½ ounces—predominantly come from two ingredients: milk (or cream) and sugar. In some cases, you'd get almost as much of the sweet stuff as you would in a can of soda. For instance, a 12-ounce can of cola has 40 grams of sugars. A 9½-ounce bottle of Starbucks Frappuccino Mocha has 31 grams, or almost 8 teaspoons. Even if you take the natural sugars in milk into account, you're still getting approximately 6 teaspoons of added sugar in the coffee drink. There are lower-sugar options that hover around

100 calories; some of them contained artificial sweeteners.

Three of the drinks we looked at—Starbucks Frappuccino Mocha, Starbucks Frappuccino Mocha Light, and Bolthouse Farms Mocha Cappuccino—supplied at least 20 percent of your daily needs for calcium. Bolthouse boasts that its product has 7 grams of protein, but that hardly gives it an advantage over the others; most range from 3 to 6 grams per serving. Plus it's packed with 28 grams of sugars. By comparison, a 3½-ounce container of Chobani Bite coffee with dark chocolate chips Greek yogurt has 8 grams of protein and 12 grams of sugars.

Bottom line. There's no need to spend more at a coffee chain to satisfy your iced-java craving. And if you choose carefully, you won't do too much damage to your waistline, either. Starbucks Discoveries Caffè Mocha rated Very Good and has just 120 calories. International Delight Iced Coffee Mocha Light is the least expensive and received a Good rating.

SPLASH OF FUN
You can enjoy a Starbucks Frappuccino Mocha for less than \$2 per serving.



Should you buy a GM car?

General Motors has announced a number of recalls recently that now affect more than 13 million vehicles. So you might be wondering whether it's smart to buy a car from any of GM's divisions: Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, and GMC. There's no easy answer, although the reasons to buy or not go well beyond

the current safety recalls.

Recalls alone don't suggest a trouble-prone company. All automakers have recalls, and most models are subject to at least one at some point. In fact, a recall can be seen as a positive step: A safety problem has been identified, and a free solution is being made available to the customer.

The key is for an automaker to identify a problem early and respond to it quickly, with clear communication to customers and essential support for dealerships. GM failed to do those things with the ignition-switch problem in several of its small cars, which resulted in at least 13 deaths. But since being

brought before Congress to account for its poor response, GM seems to be redoubling its safety efforts and jumping on other problems that span a wide range of models. That is partially the reason for the new wave of recalls we've seen.

Here are some things to consider if you are in the market for a car from one of GM's brands:

Be cautious with used GM cars

Vehicles built by the "Old GM," in its prebankruptcy days, often didn't measure up to the competition. That was reflected in mediocre road-test results and below-average reliability Ratings. We didn't recommend many of those models even when they were new. And many GM vehicles are listed as "Used Cars to Avoid" in our 2014 Annual Auto Issue. When

Ratings

In order of taste.



Product	Serving size (fl. oz.)	Cost per serving	Per serving				Comments
			Calories	Fat (g)	Sugars (g)	Protein (g)	
VERY GOOD							
Starbucks Discoveries Caffè Mocha	8	\$0.83	120	2	17	3	With well-blended flavors of brewed coffee, milk, and chocolate, it tasted like it could have been made from scratch. There's just a hint of sweetness, which is pleasantly offset by the natural bitterness of the coffee.
Starbucks Frappuccino Mocha	9.5	1.66	180	3	31	6	Has a distinct brewed-coffee flavor, with the slightly sweet taste of cooked milk and a hint of cocoa. A good option if you like a sweet treat, but beware of the high sugar content.
Illy Issimo Mochaccino	9.5	1.99	110	1	22	4	Nice blend of coffee and cocoa, but the milk flavor seems to be low. It's not overly sweet.
International Delight Iced Coffee Sweet & Creamy Mocha	8	0.49	150	2.5	23	4	You get a strong mocha flavor and hints of caramel, but the coffee notes are in the background.
Starbucks Frappuccino Mocha Light	9.5	1.54	100	3	11	6	Tastes like brewed coffee and milk with a hint of cocoa. Similar to the Starbucks Frappuccino Mocha but thinner. The artificial sweetener (sucralose and acesulfame potassium) aftertaste was a bit of a turnoff.
GOOD							
International Delight Iced Coffee Sweet & Creamy Mocha Light	8	0.48	100	2.5	14	4	Similar to International Delight Iced Coffee Sweet & Creamy Mocha but with a thinner texture. (It contains the artificial sweeteners sucralose and acesulfame potassium.) The flavor fades quickly.
Bolthouse Farms Mocha Cappuccino	8	1.00	160	2.5	28	7	Tastes like pudding, with lots of dairy, vanilla, and caramel flavors, but coffee and chocolate don't stand out as part of the flavor profile. The gelatinous texture was a bit off-putting.
Almond Breeze Iced Coffee Mocha	8	0.52	100	2	17	1	This dairy-free drink has chocolate and coffee flavors with caramel notes, but it tastes like instant rather than brewed coffee. It also has a cardboardlike flavor and a slightly gummy texture.

buying any used car, you should check with a dealer or repair shop to make sure any recall work has been performed. If it hasn't, have it done immediately. You can check for recalls online at ConsumerReports.org/carrecalls.

New models are better bets

In the past few years, we've seen a significant improvement in many GM models, with impressive fit and finish, competitive features, and strong performance.

The Buick Regal, Cadillac ATS, and Chevrolet Corvette, Impala, and Silverado did particularly well in our road tests and now perform very competitively in their categories.

But reliability remains inconsistent for many models. So check the latest road-test and reliability Ratings before buying.

Know when to toss it

Have you noticed that some of the jars, cans, and tubes in your pantry and bathroom closets have been there for ... eons? Foods and certain other products are labeled to indicate when they should be tossed, although dates can be confusing. You're left in the dark with other products. Here's a hint: From now on, avoid guesswork by marking those kinds of products with the date on which they were bought; then use this guide:



Blurred words

A report by Harvard Law School and the Natural Resources Defense Council cited confusing food labeling as "one factor leading to an estimated 160 billion pounds of food trashed in the U.S. every year." Except for infant formula, product dating is not required by federal regulations, and there's no uniform system for food dating.

"Sell By" simply tells the store how long to display the product. It is not an indication of when food becomes unsafe or even past its peak. Buy the product before the date, but it should still be fine after that. (Milk, for instance, should be OK for a week after its sell-by date.)

"Best if Used By (or Before)" or "Use By" is the recommended deadline for best flavor or quality, and it is determined by the manufacturer. It's not a purchase deadline and doesn't indicate

that food is spoiled or unsafe. "Even if the date expires during home storage," the Department of Agriculture says, "a product should be safe, wholesome, and of good quality if handled properly."

Coded dates, often on shelf-stable products such as canned goods, are packing numbers for use by the maker and might not mean anything to consumers. But toss any cans that are rusty, dented, or swollen.

Down the drain?

The claim. The maker of Drain-FX claims that the snakelike device is "100% effective" at unclogging "multiple drains," and a video shows it clearing sand and hair. We paid \$20 for Drain-FX Sinks, which has a 29-inch tube that connects directly to a faucet (as long as it has a removable aerator), and \$40 for Drain-FX Plus, which adds a 15-foot hose extension and a valve for use in bathtubs, showers, and floor drains.

The check. We concocted four clogs of various materials: lard and cooked rice; bar soap, toothpaste, and hair; sand; and hair alone. For comparison, we used a traditional plunger. And we asked staffers to take Drain-FX home to see how it adapted to different faucets and drains.

Bottom line. Three out of four isn't bad. Drain-FX cleared the lardy, soapy, and sandy clogs. Only the clump of hair proved a challenge: Drain-FX created a passage through the hair but didn't clear the clump completely. Some staffers had trouble fitting the tube through a drain strainer or stopper—you might need to disassemble the drain—but those who succeeded found that the device improved water flow. And the plunger? It worked too, just more slowly and with more effort.



Steps to a safer cookout

Outdoor cooking and dining adds some spice to a meal. But when you're hosting a cookout, it's important to pay attention to a few points to make sure everyone will safely enjoy the meal.

1. Keep your food safe. Transport it directly from refrigerator to the grill or keep it cold in an ice chest at 40° F or below until cooking or serving to minimize bacterial growth.

2. Keep the grill clean. Use a stainless-steel stiff-wire brush to clean both sides of the grates while hot. Use tongs to drag a paper towel moistened with salt water over them to get rid of unsavory morsels such as broken

bristles and leftover chunks of char.

3. Cook thoroughly. Use a meat thermometer to make sure the meat has reached a sufficient internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria. That's at least 145° F for steaks, chops and fish; 160° F for ground beef or pork; and 165° F for poultry.

4. But don't overdo it. Heavily charred meat can expose you to potentially cancer-causing compounds.

And other unhealthy chemicals can form when fat drips into the flame. Though occasional exposure is OK, avoiding them when you can makes sense. Trimming fat off the meat and using marinades before you grill can help.

5. Serve promptly. Serve hot foods right away and keep cold dishes such as pasta and potato salads chilled until it's time to eat. Food should not sit out for longer than

2 hours, or 1 hour if the temperature is above 90° F.

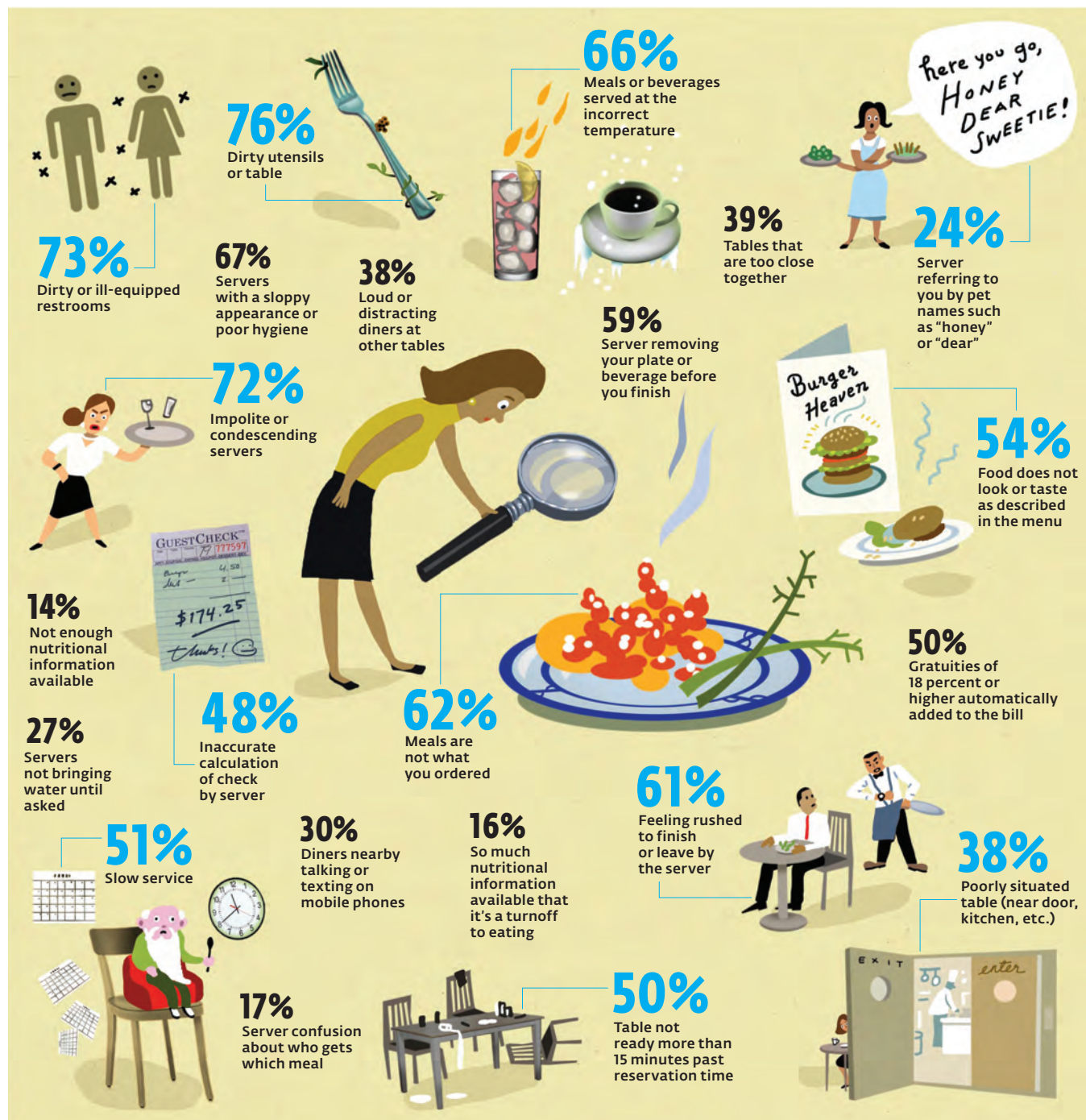
6. Don't reuse plates. If a tray or platter held raw meat, poultry, or seafood before the grilling began, it could contain bacteria from the original dish. Use a clean plate to hold the cooked food to avoid contamination, and never use the same utensils.

THE GRIPE-O-METER RESTAURANTS

Dirty tables, utensils, or restrooms at restaurants are among the top gripes of people when they are dining out, according to our exclusive national survey, even more so than complaints about food. Men and women pretty much agree on that, although women complained about dirty or ill-equipped restrooms a little more than men. The

numbers below are the percentage of people highly annoyed with a specific gripe from the survey of 1,003 adults by the Consumer Reports National Research Center in March 2014.

For more on fast-food restaurants, and which are tops for cleanliness and the best signature dishes, see page 15.



Passport to smarter spending abroad

WE'RE SURE YOU CAN THINK of lots of ways to burn through your money while on your next trip abroad. But if you don't pack your wallet as carefully as you do your suitcase, poor currency exchange rates and high transaction fees could empty it fast.

That means leaving the cash (which is risky to carry in quantity and expensive to exchange for local currency) and traveler's checks (which can be inconvenient to buy and use) at home and bringing the right types of plastic. According to a study by Card Hub, a credit-card website, credit and debit cards offer the most favorable currency exchange rates, better even than banks. Using them is also safe and convenient. As they do at home, they protect you against unauthorized purchases and withdrawals, and they're accepted almost everywhere. But not every card is foreign-travel-friendly, so you still have to plan carefully.

Choose the right card. A downside to using plastic is the transaction fee imposed for converting currencies: 1.91 percent for the average debit-card transaction and 2.21 percent for credit cards at the institutions Card Hub studied. Avoid it with a no-foreign-transaction-fee card, such as the American Express Platinum card or the Bank of America Travel Rewards card. You can also sign up for a no-foreign-fee checking account, such as Capital One 360 Checking, for paying by debit card. For more options, check with your bank or at cardhub.com and creditcards.com.

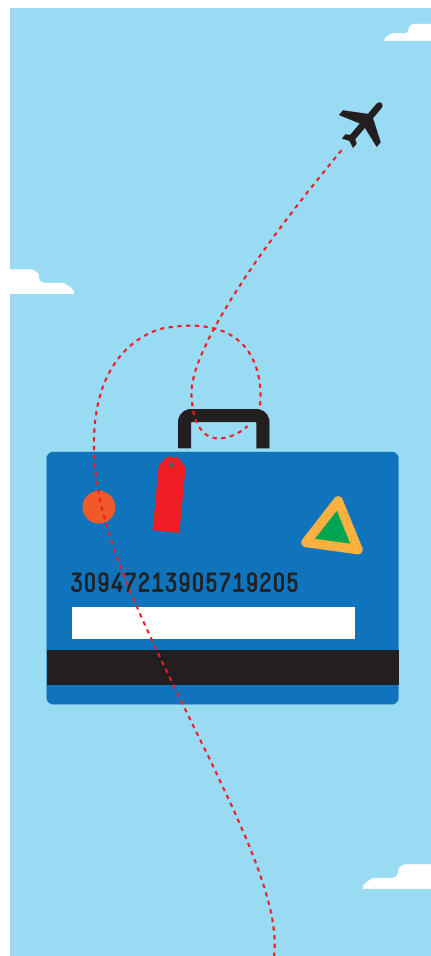
Research ATM availability. Many banks have online locators to help you find ATMs where you're visiting. Remember that when you withdraw money abroad, as in the U.S., you might incur fees from your bank and the bank that owns the ATM. (That's in addition to any foreign-transaction fees.) You might be able to dodge ATM fees by using machines owned by banks affiliated with your own. Bank of America, for instance, participates in the Global ATM Alliance. Ask your bank or check its website for more information on how to find those friendly ATMs. While you're at it, make sure

that whatever cards you're using have four-digit PINs, which might be needed for accessing foreign ATMs.

Carry some cash just in case. None of the travelers we spoke with said they had much trouble using traditional magnetic-strip credit and debit cards in other countries. But U.S.-issued cards, even those with newer microchip technology, might not work everywhere in Europe, Asia, Canada, and Mexico. As one of our staffers discovered at a Paris gas station, self-pay machines can be uncooperative. So be sure to have some euros or rupees on hand as a backup.

Pay in local currency. Don't bite if a foreign merchant offers to process a credit-card transaction in dollars instead of the local currency. You'll immediately know exactly what the exchange rate is, but you'll probably end up paying more. Stick with having the card network do the conversion later.

Contact your card issuers. Before traveling, let your card issuers know the dates you'll be out of the country. If you don't and they see a flurry of foreign transactions and can't reach you to confirm their validity, they might disable your accounts.



Safety and security steps

Have multiple cards.

That way, you won't face a crisis if one or more is lost, stolen, or devoured by an ATM, advises George Hobica, a frequent traveler who writes for the Smarter Travel website. Also keep small, separate stashes of cash.

Monitor your accounts.

If you have cell-phone access, keep an eye on your accounts for unauthorized activity while you're away. Install your card issuers' banking apps and sign up for text and/or e-mail alerts.

Keep your receipts.

If you need to dispute a charge or withdrawal from your account, having a receipt is crucial. Insist that merchants provide receipts that clearly detail the correct amount. Once you're home, carefully monitor your credit-card and banking statements, and report any errors or fraud immediately. Federal law limits the amount of time you have to report errors.





When you need medical care, stat

ONE OF YOUR EYES has become red and itchy, and you suspect you have pinkeye. Unfortunately, it's Saturday and you'll have to wait until Monday to see your doctor. But there's another option: a walk-in clinic inside your local drugstore or big-box retailer. Those offer treatment for non-emergency problems at convenient hours, and often minus the wait time and expense of the emergency room. And many insurers cover them.

Can you really get quality medical care at a CVS? Evidence suggests you can, at least across the relatively narrow range of conditions that the clinics treat. In a study published in 2009 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, researchers at the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research institute, evaluated the care given for three common illnesses—urinary tract infection, sore throat, and ear infection—at a group of clinics inside retail stores in Minnesota. They found that the level of care was similar at retail clinics, urgent-care centers, and doctor's offices—but lower at emergency departments.

"Retail-store clinics serve a purpose at present," says Marvin M. Lipman, M.D., CONSUMER REPORTS' chief medical adviser since 1967. "They have leapt into the void by providing services for run-of-the-mill acute problems at times when patients can't always get in to see their primary care doctor and emergency rooms are overcrowded."

Not everyone is a fan of retail-based health care. Here are two of the main drawbacks and what to do about them.

• They may disrupt "continuity of care."

Some doctors worry that walk-in clinics interfere with what's known as continuity of care, meaning patients aren't receiving treatment from the same doctor over time. That may be especially risky if you suffer from a chronic condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure. But about 62 million Americans—including many with insurance—have little or no access to primary care, because they either don't have a doctor or can't easily get an appointment when they need one.

What to do If you go to a retail clinic, make sure it sends a record of the visit to your primary care provider, if you have one. That is supposed to be standard operating procedure at the clinics, but if they don't ask, bring it up yourself. And our medical advisers caution against using a retail clinic for ongoing, chronic conditions. That's best done by a provider you see regularly.

• **They may not be the best option for kids.** That's the contention of the American Academy of Pediatrics, which in February 2014 advised parents to stay away from retail clinics because they don't have complete health records on young patients and the care may be lacking in quality (for example, the clinics' practitioners may overprescribe antibiotics). But the RAND study found no evidence to support those concerns.

What to do It's still best to see your regular pediatrician when you can. But if after-hours appointments aren't available or you're away from home, a retail clinic could be a reasonable substitute.

3 walk-in options

Retail clinics aren't for emergencies; for those, you still need to call 911 or head to the nearest emergency room. Here's a comparison of the available quick-care options:

Retail clinic

What it is A walk-in clinic inside a retail store with an on-site pharmacy; major players include CVS, Target, Walgreens, and Walmart.

Who works there Mainly nurse practitioners—nurses with advanced training who can prescribe medication and practice independently in some states.

How many in the U.S. About 1,700.

Consider them for Vaccines; ailments that are bothersome but not life-threatening, including bronchitis, ear infections, minor sprains, sore throat, and urinary tract infections.

Average price per visit* \$110

Urgent-care center

What it is A walk-in center owned by a hospital, group of doctors, or independent investors that provides extended hours and is open on weekends.

Who works there A physician who specializes in family or emergency medicine; a physician assistant (PA), nurse, or radiologist may also be on site.

How many in the U.S. About 9,000.

Consider them for Problems that are urgent but not severe enough to warrant a trip to the ER, such as a fracture or deep cut that may need stitches.

Average price per visit* \$156

Emergency room

What it is A hospital department equipped to treat life-threatening emergencies around the clock.

Who works there Emergency-medicine physicians, nurses, PAs, specialists.

How many in the U.S. About 3,700.

Consider them for Situations that threaten "life or limb," such as difficulty breathing, chest pain, seizures, head trauma, vomiting blood, severe allergic reaction, or loss of consciousness.

Average price per visit* \$570

*Represents average amount billed to patient and/or his insurer (plus patient co-pay). Figures are from 2009 *Annals of Internal Medicine* study.



DROP-IN CARE Retail-store clinics promise fast help for common health woes.



RECALLS

AUTOMOBILES

'09-'14 Buick Enclave, Chevrolet Traverse, and GMC Acadia, and '09-'10 Saturn Outlook

The flexible steel cable that connects the seat belt to the front outboard seating positions may separate over time. If that happens, the seat belt may not properly restrain you in a crash.

MODELS 1,339,355 '09-'14 Buick Enclaves made April 14, 2008, through May 14, 2014; Chevrolet Traverses made June 6, 2008, through May 14, 2014; and GMC Acadias made April 9, 2008, through May 14, 2014; and '09-'10 Saturn Outlooks produced April 14, 2008, through March 18, 2010.

WHAT TO DO Dealer will repair and replace the lap pretensioner as necessary, free of charge. For details call GM at 800-222-1020, Chevrolet at 800-521-7300, Buick at 800-462-8782, or Saturn at 800-553-6000.

HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

Office Depot Gibson leather chairs

Mounting-plate weld can break and separate the seat from the base of the chair.

PRODUCTS 1,400,000 chairs sold at Office Depot and online from 2003 through 2012 for about \$40. Office Depot has had 153 reports of the seat-plate weld cracking or breaking, with 25 reports of injuries.

WHAT TO DO Stop using the chair and return it to any Office Depot store for a \$55 store credit. Call Office Depot at 866-403-3763 or go to officedepot.com.

Gree dehumidifiers

Dehumidifiers can overheat, smoke, and catch fire, posing a risk of burns.

PRODUCTS 2.5 million dehumidifiers with brand names Danby, DeLonghi, Fedders, Fellini, Frigidaire, GE, Gree, Kenmore, Norpole, Premiere, Seabreeze, SoleusAir, and SuperClima. Original recall was announced in September 2013, updated in October 2013, and expanded in January 2014. Units were sold nationwide and online from January 2005 through August 2013 for between \$110 and \$400. The number of reports of overheating machines has increased to 471 (almost 400 percent) since September 2013 recall. The number of reported fires has risen to 121, and property-damage reports have more than doubled to almost \$4.5 million.

WHAT TO DO Unplug the machine and contact Gree at 866-853-2802 or go to greeusa.com for a refund.

White-Rodgers home heating and cooling thermostats

Alkaline batteries in the thermostat can leak onto the circuit board, posing a risk of fire.

PRODUCTS 740,000 digital thermostats sold nationwide from January 2006 through December 2013 for \$30 to \$70.

WHAT TO DO Check the thermostat for battery icon on the left side of the blue lighted screen. If the icon doesn't appear, contact White-Rodgers at 888-624-1901 or go to white-rodgers.com to get a free repair or a replacement thermostat.

Buckyballs founder agrees to \$375,000 recall fund

The founder of the magnetic desk-toy company that produced Buckyballs has reached an agreement with the Consumer Product Safety Commission to recall the product and set up a \$375,000 trust fund to reimburse consumers.

The agreement with Craig Zucker, head of Maxfield and Oberton Holdings, settles an unusual case in which the CPSC filed an administrative action almost two years ago to stop distribution of Buckyballs and Buckycubes. About a year later the CPSC amended the case to add Zucker individually.

The CPSC said the product, which uses rare earth metals to create high-powered magnets in the form of small spheres and other shapes, had been implicated in numerous incidents in which the magnets were ingested and surgery was needed because of internal injuries that resulted. In 2009 the CPSC banned the sale of children's toys that have superstrong magnets, but the problem didn't go away because the items were

repositioned as adult toys. Zucker has disputed the case but agreed to the recall and trust fund to settle the complaint.

Several other companies that produced similar products have already agreed to recall their versions.

The agency says consumers should stop using the magnetic toys and search for any pieces that have strayed from their sets, which often contain more than 200 balls that can be strung together to form sculptures.

Money from the trust fund will be used to set up a website with information on the Buckyballs recall and a registration form for filing a claim.

You can find more information at cpsc.gov.



Bed handles blamed in deaths

Three women have died after being trapped between mattresses and portable adult bed handles, leading to the recall of 113,000 products. The bed handles were sold at home health care stores, drugstores, and medical-equipment stores nationwide, and in home and health care catalogs from January 1994 through December 2007 for about \$100. The Consumer Product Safety Commission and the manufacturer, Bed Handles of Blue Springs, Mo., cooperated in the recall of the Original Bedside Assistant, Travel Handles set, and Adjustable Bedside Assistant. Consumers should stop using all recalled bed handles that were sold without safety retention straps and contact the company for the straps at 800-725-6903 or online at bedhandles.com/recall.html.



AMERICA'S BEST & WORST FAST FOOD

Our national love affair with Burger King, KFC, and McDonald's is far from over, but newer chains have captured consumers' fancy. Chew over the results from our latest reader survey.

A **AMERICANS ARE SPENDING** more than ever to dine out—topping \$680 billion per year. And they are demanding more for their money, higher-quality fast food, and greater variety than can be found at titans such as Burger King, KFC, and McDonald's.

That's according to CONSUMER REPORTS' latest fast-food survey. After devouring 96,208 meals at 65 chains, CONSUMER REPORTS readers told us that quality of the food has become more important in their dining decisions, and convenience of location is less so than in our 2011 report. They could be reasons the traditional fast-food chains are losing their edge: Diners, especially younger adults in the millennial

generation, may be more willing to go out of their way to get a tasty meal.

Restaurants are a part of the millennials' social structure, and they choose to spend less at meals so that they can eat out more often, says Darren Tristano, executive vice president of Technomic, a food-service research and consulting firm. "Fast-casual dining in places like Chipotle and Panda Express lets the consumer guide the staff to prepare their meal just the way they like it," he adds. In contrast, he says many of the traditional chains have lagged in offering higher-quality ingredients. Chains such as Chipotle, Noodles & Company, and Panera are even offering meat that has been produced without the use of antibiotics in

animal feed, an attraction for many health-conscious consumers.

Once you get past the big guys, you'll find many fine national (defined as operating in six or more states) and regional restaurants. Some of the best are In-N-Out Burger, Jason's Deli, Papa Murphy's Take 'N' Bake Pizza, Portillo's Hot Dogs, and The Habit Burger Grill. Our survey also reveals the restaurants with the best and worst signature dishes (spoiler alert: You might be shocked what readers said about McDonald's burgers).

And breakfast is a new fast-food battleground, with more chains offering meals, including Taco Bell, which has introduced the Waffle Taco to take on McDonald's McGriddles. Hungry yet? Read on.

Restaurants for every taste

When you're looking for a quick meal, you have thousands of choices. And you may not want to settle for the same old ones, depending on what matters most to you. Except for healthful choices and regional gems, the listings are for chains considered "national" by industry experts and are alphabetical. Overall scores are on page 21.

If you want ...

HEALTHFUL CHOICES

Outlets where readers say they found healthful meal options.

TOP OF THE LIST

96%	Subway
95%	Jason's Deli
92%	Panera Bread
92%	Corner Bakery Cafe
89%	McAlister's Deli
89%	El Pollo Loco
89%	Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill
89%	Noodles & Company
88%	Baja Fresh Mexican Grill
87%	Boston Market
86%	Au Bon Pain
86%	Pei Wei Asian Diner
85%	Chipotle Mexican Grill
85%	Qdoba Mexican Grill

BOTTOM OF THE LIST

29%	Krystal
26%	Checkers Drive-In
24%	Five Guys Burgers and Fries
22%	Little Caesars
22%	White Castle

Though many restaurants are serving more soups, salads, and grilled-rather-than-fried items, and cutting down on ingredients such as sodium, most diners aren't concerned about dieting when they eat out.

Only 20 percent of survey respondents consider the availability of healthful menu options when choosing a restaurant. And just 19 percent of readers say they ordered a healthful meal during their most recent dining experience. Women were more conscientious than men. Forty-two percent (vs. 28 percent of men surveyed) were swayed to order lower-calorie fare

from restaurants that conspicuously displayed nutritional information on the menu. But when we asked respondents whether their menus displayed calorie and fat counts, 51 percent said they were unsure.

If healthy eating is a priority, steer clear of pizza and burger chains. The chains in this section topped the list for diners who said there were ample healthy alternatives from which to choose.

Another healthful consideration: Chipotle, Culver's, and Panera are serving poultry raised without antibiotics, and Chick-fil-A is moving in that direction.

HOW THEY DO IT

Subway says it has reduced the sodium content of its core menu items an average 28 percent in its low-fat sandwiches and an average 15 percent in all lunch and dinner subs over the past three years.

If you want ...

MORE FOR YOUR MONEY

Readers' choices for value.

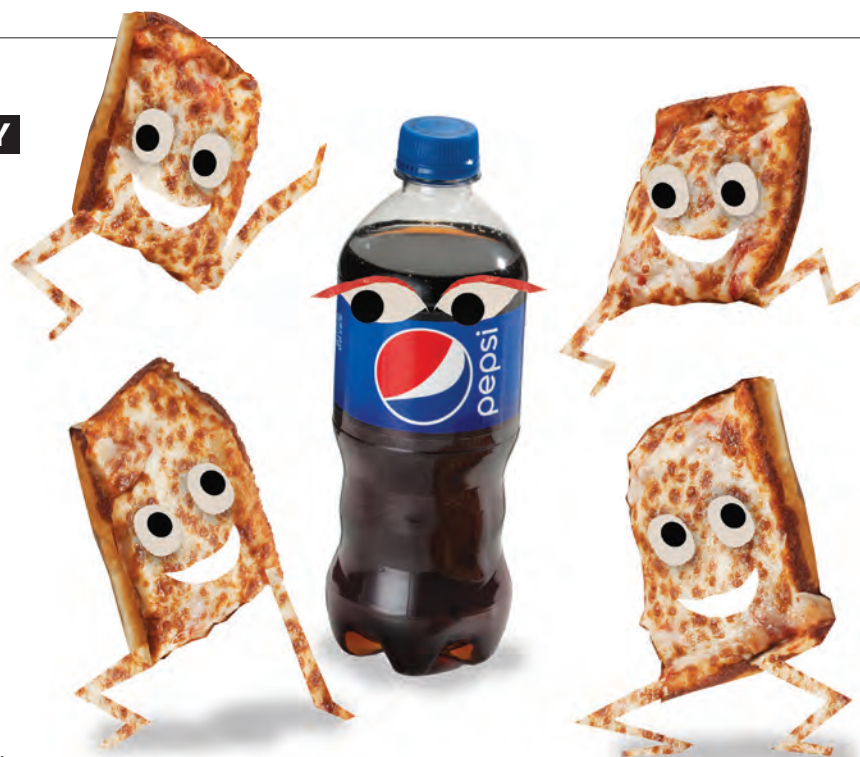
TOP OF THE LIST

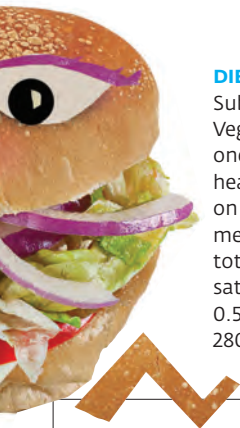
Del Taco
Little Caesars
Papa Murphy's Take 'N' Bake Pizza

BOTTOM OF THE LIST

Burger King
Church's
KFC
Panda Express
Sbarro

Cheap food isn't necessarily a bargain, and remarkably, just 22 percent of respondents thought their meal offered excellent value. These three chains were the standouts—judged better-than-average—in terms of how much bang they offered readers for their dining dollars.





DIET DELIGHT

Subway's 6-inch Veggie Delite is one of many hearty, healthy sandwiches on the chain's menu. Calories: 230, total fat: 2.5 grams, saturated fat: 0.5 grams, sodium: 280 milligrams.

If you want ...

REGIONAL GEMS

Top local choices for food and other measures.

TOP OF THE LIST

Burgerville
In-N-Out Burger
Portillo's Hot Dogs
Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill
The Habit Burger Grill

Many of the restaurants in our survey are mega chains, operating thousands of units in all or many parts of the country—tens of thousands in the case of Subway and McDonald's.

If you're not lucky enough to live near the areas of operation of the ones listed above, these five are worth a visit should you spot their logos while traveling. In-N-Out Burger operates about 300 units mostly in California, but also in Arizona, Nevada, Texas, and Utah. The Habit Burger Grill, with about 100 locations, is another California-centric chain with a presence in Arizona and Utah as well. Rubio's is out West, too, with 193 units in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. Portillo's Hot Dogs has about 40 locations, mostly in Illinois, but also in Arizona, California, and Indiana. Burgerville has 40 restaurants in Oregon and Washington state.

HOW THEY DO IT

In-N-Out Burger has cooked-to-order burgers made from premium chuck, ground by their own butchers, with the buns baked in-house.

If you want ...

TOP SERVICE

Places where readers say the service was exceptionally polite.

TOP OF THE LIST

Chick-fil-A
Culver's
Firehouse Subs
Five Guys Burgers and Fries
Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburger
Jason's Deli
Jersey Mike's Subs
McAlister's Deli
Noodles & Company
Panera Bread
Papa Murphy's Take 'N' Bake Pizza
Potbelly Sandwich Shop
Smashburger
Whataburger

Solicitous, prompt, and accurate service was the norm at most chains. Approximately three-quarters of readers described the staff's politeness as excellent or very good. And only 4 percent of diners complained that employees made a mistake with their orders. Despite relatively high marks in the industry overall for service, the listed chains stood out for the politeness of their staffs. Who do readers think are the fastest? Chick-fil-A, Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwich Shop, and Papa Murphy's Take 'N' Bake Pizza.



HOW THEY DO IT

Five Guys Burgers and Fries says it follows a philosophy of focusing on a few items and serving them to the best of its ability.



If you want ...

FAST-FOOD ALTERNATIVES

Readers' choices for fast-casual restaurants.

TOP OF THE LIST

Chipotle Mexican Grill
Firehouse Subs
Five Guys Burgers and Fries
Jason's Deli
Jersey Mike's Subs
Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches
McAlister's Deli
Panera Bread
Schlotzsky's

Fast-casual restaurants are a step up from fast food (Chipotle describes its fare as "farm to face"). They usually serve higher-quality fare, charge higher menu prices, and focus more on a dine-in rather than drive-through experience. And they're big on breakfast. The ones listed were among the most praiseworthy. McAlister's Deli gets the award for most improved. The chain's score increased significantly since our 2011 report.



If you want ...

CLEAN SURROUNDINGS

Top scores from readers for cleanliness of the dining area.

TOP OF THE LIST

Chick-fil-A
Culver's
Firehouse Subs
Freddy's Frozen Custard
& Steakburger
Jason's Deli
McAlister's Deli
Panera Bread
Pei Wei Asian Diner
Schlotzsky's
Smashburger
Whataburger

BOTTOM OF THE LIST

CiCi's Pizza
KFC

Readers were generally quite pleased with the cleanliness of the dining area; three-quarters of respondents were completely or very satisfied. Only 4 percent were dissatisfied in some way. However, the chains listed above were particularly sparkling. Conversely, two restaurants received subpar grades for cleanliness: CiCi's Pizza and KFC.

Foods to fear

Though many chains have adapted their menus to make it easier to choose healthfulness over indulgence, our survey clearly shows that most diners aren't eating healthier options. Lurking alongside all of those grilled chicken wraps are eye-popping gut-busters. As bad as calories and fat might be, sodium, which can adversely affect blood pressure and heart health, might be a bigger culprit; some items—excluding side dishes—contain almost a day's worth. The good news: If you want to know about the dietary damage beforehand, it's easy to find. Almost all chains post nutritional information on their websites. Here are seven dubious guilty pleasures at well-known chains. For perspective, U.S. dietary guidelines generally recommend individuals consume no more than 2,000 calories, 65 grams of fat, and 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day.



Burger King
Triple
Whopper

CALORIES
1,160

FAT (G)
75

SODIUM (MG)
1,050

Firehouse Subs
Sweet Thai Chili
Pork Sub (large)

CALORIES
1,541

FAT (G)
95

SODIUM (MG)
3,458

Hardee's ¾ Pound
Monster
Thickburger

CALORIES
1,330

FAT (G)
95

SODIUM (MG)
2,820

Wendy's Dave's Hot
'N Juicy ¾ lb. Triple
Cheeseburger

CALORIES
1,090

FAT (G)
66

SODIUM (MG)
1,990

McDonald's Premium
Crispy Chicken Bacon
Clubhouse Sandwich

CALORIES
750

FAT (G)
38

SODIUM (MG)
1,720

Taco Bell Cantina
Burrito—Steak

CALORIES
750

FAT (G)
28

SODIUM (MG)
1,940

Subway
Pepperoni Flatizza

CALORIES
500

FAT (G)
26

SODIUM (MG)
1,340



Who are the taste champs for burgers, chicken, and more

We asked subscribers this direct question: On a scale of 1 to 10, from least delicious to most delicious you've ever eaten, how would you rate the taste? We heard about 53,745 burger chains' burgers, chicken chains' fried or roasted chicken, Mexican chains' burritos, and sandwich chains' subs (or heroes, hoagies, grinders, or wedges, depending on where you call home).

The tables reveal that some signature dishes came close to our readers' benchmarks for excellence. But many of the biggest names earned significantly lower scores for the foods that made them famous, notably McDonald's. The chain, which serves flash-frozen patties made with 100% USDA-inspected beef, touts them as free from "preservatives, fillers, extenders, and so-called pink slime." Such a pledge might be comforting, but it's hardly a rousing endorsement. McDonald's own customers ranked its burgers significantly worse than those of 20 competitors, including Hardee's, White Castle, and Carl's Jr. No other house specialty scored as low.

Taco Bell's burritos were also voted least luscious. And the subs from Subway, the world's largest restaurant chain with more than 40,000 units in 106 countries, are near the bottom of the list.

BURGERS

8.1	The Habit Burger Grill
8.0	In-N-Out Burger
7.9	Five Guys Burgers and Fries
7.9	Smashburger
7.8	Fuddruckers
7.7	Culver's
7.7	Whataburger
7.7	Burgerville
7.7	Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburgers
7.5	Steak 'n Shake
7.5	Hardee's
7.2	Carl's Jr.
7.0	White Castle
6.8	Wendy's
6.8	Checkers Drive-In
6.7	Sonic
6.7	A&W
6.6	Krystal
6.6	Burger King
6.6	Jack in the Box
5.8	McDonald's

CHICKEN

8.0	Chick-fil-A
7.7	El Pollo Loco
7.7	Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen
7.7	Boston Market
7.6	Bojangles' Famous Chicken 'n Biscuits
7.3	Zaxby's
7.3	Church's Chicken
7.1	KFC

SANDWICHES & SUBS

8.5	Portillo's Hot Dogs
8.2	Firehouse Subs
8.2	Schlotzsky's
8.0	Jason's Deli
8.0	McAlister's Deli
7.8	Jersey Mike's Subs
7.8	Panera Bread
7.7	Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches
7.7	Potbelly Sandwich Shop
7.4	Quiznos
7.4	Einstein Bros. Bagels
7.3	Corner Bakery Cafe
7.3	Arby's
7.2	Subway
7.0	Au Bon Pain

BURRITOS

7.8	Chipotle Mexican Grill
7.7	Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill
7.6	Qdoba Mexican Grill
7.6	Baja Fresh Mexican Grill
7.4	Moe's Southwest Grill
7.2	Taco John's
6.9	Del Taco
6.3	Taco Bell

Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center. Differences of at least 0.4 are meaningful for chicken, burritos, and sandwiches. The meaningful difference among burgers is 0.5 or more.



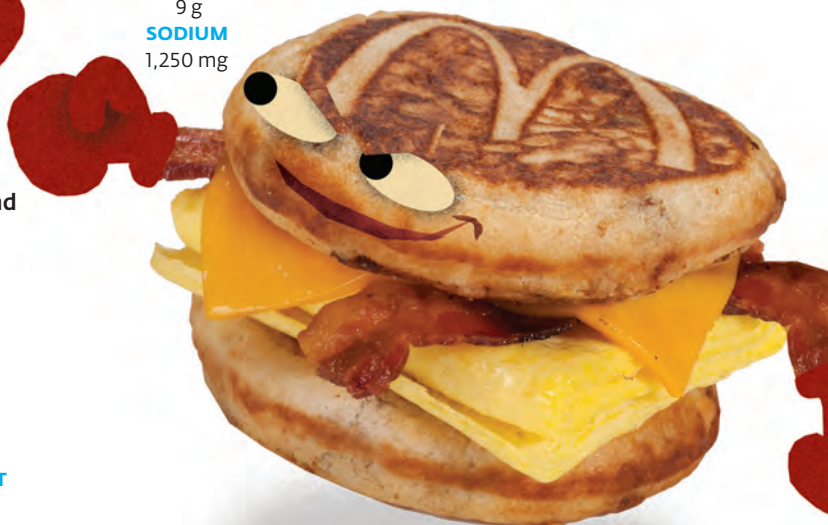


TACO BELL
Waffle Taco
Bacon, Egg, and
Cheese

PRICE PAID
\$2.69
SERVING SIZE
3.6 ounces
CALORIES
320
TOTAL FAT
18 g
SATURATED FAT
5 g
SODIUM
670 mg

MCDONALD'S
Bacon, Egg, and
Cheese McGriddles

PRICE PAID
\$3.29 to \$3.49
SERVING SIZE
6.1 ounces
CALORIES
460
TOTAL FAT
21 g
SATURATED FAT
9 g
SODIUM
1,250 mg



Battle of the breakfast sandwiches

TACO BELL TOOK a direct shot at rival McDonald's—and its longtime clown mascot—earlier this year when the chain rolled out a new TV ad featuring various men named Ronald McDonald savoring Taco Bell's Waffle Taco breakfast sandwich. The not-so-subtle put-down of the similar McGriddles from McDonald's prompted CONSUMER REPORTS to join the fray and settle the argument objectively.

To tackle the project, three expert testers drove to several McDonald's and Taco Bell restaurants near our Yonkers, N.Y., headquarters and ordered multiple bacon, egg, and cheese sandwiches to assure they didn't get a bad apple. One staffer placed the order, anonymously, of course, and brought the food back to the car so that the team could sample it at the peak of freshness.

They bit into their sandwiches to get an overall impression, then jotted down notes. (They also used a spit cup—a common accessory tasters use to avoid palate fatigue and to keep from packing on the pounds.) They also tasted each of the components separately and discussed the attributes until they reached a consensus.

Fortuitously, the car windows happened

to be tinted. That kept out the eyes of curious passersby who might wonder what all the chewing and spitting was about. The experts knew what attributes to look for in a high-quality sandwich based on prior knowledge and experience tasting eggs, breakfast meats, and a variety of breads.

Deconstructing the sandwiches

The Taco Bell Waffle Taco contains pieces of scrambled egg, melted shredded cheese, and bacon bits wrapped in a waffle. The waffle had a sweet aroma reminiscent of a boxed cake mix. The bacon bits were plentiful and flavorful but slightly dry and chewy. Neither the egg nor the cheese had much flavor.

A Taco Bell staffer said the cheese was cheddar. We couldn't tell because it was so bland. When tasters added the syrup that accompanied the sandwich (the menu described it as "sweet" syrup, and a follow-up phone call to a different Taco Bell restaurant confirmed that it was a processed product far from pure maple syrup), it masked the bacon flavor a bit and contributed to a pleasant sweet and savory character.

The well-stuffed McGriddles was about

two-thirds larger than the Waffle Taco. Inside two thick, sweet, and slightly doughy pancakes were a folded plain egg omelet, a slice of processed American cheese, and several bacon strips (the number varied). Like the Waffle Taco, the egg had little flavor, but the generous portion of bacon was tasty and the cheese had identifiable American cheese flavor. The sandwich left a slightly bitter taste on the tip of the tasters' tongues, but it wasn't a deal-breaker.

The bottom line

Our testers preferred the McGriddles because of the tastier bacon and cheese flavors. Both sandwiches were quite greasy, so be sure to pick up plenty of napkins. Considering the components, neither is a great nutritional choice. Ounce for ounce, there isn't much difference in calories between the two.

Both sandwiches come in several variations. The Waffle Taco, for example, is available without meat, and you can substitute egg whites for whole eggs on the McGriddles. The two also have a sausage, egg, and cheese version, which actually worsens the nutritional damage.

75%

Sandwich shops

The percentage of diners eating at sandwich chains who were highly satisfied with their last visit, more than those who ate at other types of chains.

66%

Happier diners

The percentage of readers overall who were highly satisfied with their fast-food dining trips; up 6 percentage points from our last survey.

50%

Food quality

The percentage of readers who said food quality was a big reason for their choices; up from 40 percent in our previous survey.

64%

Convenience

The percentage who said location was a major factor in their choice of restaurant; down from 75 percent three years ago.

Ratings Restaurants

In order of reader score, by category.

Restaurant	Reader score
BURGER CHAINS	
In-N-Out Burger	88
The Habit Burger Grill	86
Culver's	84
Burgerville	83
Whataburger	83
Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburgers	83
Five Guys Burgers and Fries	82
Smashburger	81
Fuddruckers	81
Steak 'n Shake	80
Hardee's	78
White Castle	78
Carl's Jr.	77
Jack in the Box	76
Krystal	76
Wendy's	76
Sonic	76
Checkers Drive-In	74
A&W All-American Food	74
Burger King	71
McDonald's	71

Restaurant	Reader score
PIZZA CHAINS	
Papa Murphy's Take 'N' Bake Pizza	88
Jet's Pizza	83
Marco's Pizza	82
Round Table Pizza	76
Papa John's	76
Little Caesars	73
Domino's Pizza	73
Pizza Hut	73
CiCi's Pizza	72
Sbarro	65

SANDWICH CHAINS	
Portillo's Hot Dogs	87
Jason's Deli	85
Firehouse Subs	84
Potbelly Sandwich Shop	84
Schlotzsky's	83
Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches	83
Jersey Mike's Subs	83
Panera Bread	82
McAlister's Deli	82
Corner Bakery Cafe	81
Subway	79
Einstein Bros. Bagels	78
Arby's	77
Quiznos	77
Au Bon Pain	76

Restaurant	Reader score
CHICKEN CHAINS	
Chick-fil-A	85
Boston Market	80
El Pollo Loco	79
Zaxby's	78
Bojangles' Famous Chicken 'n Biscuits	77
Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen	75
Church's Chicken	71
KFC	69

MEXICAN CHAINS	
Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill	84
Chipotle Mexican Grill	83
Qdoba Mexican Grill	81
Baja Fresh Mexican Grill	80
Moe's Southwest Grill	78
Del Taco	78
Taco John's	75
Taco Bell	73

ASIAN CHAINS	
Pei Wei Asian Diner	81
Noodles & Company	81
Panda Express	73

Guide to the Ratings

Ratings are based on a survey of 32,405 CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers who told us about 96,208 dining experiences at 65 hamburger, Asian, pizza, sandwich, chicken, and Mexican fast-food and fast-casual (slightly more upscale) chains from April 2012 to June 2013. Results don't necessarily reflect those of the national population. Reader score is a measure of overall satisfaction. A score

of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied with their experience; 80 means they were very well satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied. Differences of fewer than 6 points are not meaningful. The score results reflect how well each chain fared compared with the others in terms of food quality, perceived value, politeness of staff, and speed of service.

30 mobile devices plus apps and tips to make your vacation a blast

Gadgets to go

AUGUST IS ONE of America's biggest travel months—when vacationers hit the road, the airport, or the beach—but getting away doesn't necessarily mean getting away from it all. CONSUMER REPORTS' 2014 survey of 1,044 American adults finds that 94 percent of travelers bring electronic devices on vacation. In many cases, that tagalong is a smart phone: Two out of three Americans take one on vacation. But that's not all they carry. These days Americans take three devices along for the ride, on average, according to our survey.

What should be on your packing list? It depends on where you're going and what you're doing. If memorable vacation photos are important, for instance, you should consider toting a dedicated camera with a decent optical zoom and image stabilizer, features you're not likely to get with a smart phone. If you need to keep kids in the backseat occupied, a tablet loaded with videos and games could provide a little peace and quiet. And if you're contemplating lazy beach reads, a dedicated e-book reader that's easy to read in the sun will serve you much better than a do-everything tablet.

Whatever your destination or your needs, we have expert advice on the best devices, plus apps and tips that can add to your enjoyment. So get packing!

Don't forget the accessories

- Charger(s), including one or more for the car
- Adapter(s) if you're traveling abroad
- Extra batteries
- External battery pack/recharger
- Extra memory cards
- Ethernet cable for faster, more reliable Internet access in hotel rooms
- Microfiber cloth to keep displays and lenses clean

PHOTO: TRAVIS RATHBONE; PROP STYLING: WENDY SCHELAH FOR HALLEY RESOURCES



Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 8.4

GoPro Hero 3+ Silver Edition

Sony Cyber-shot DSC-TX30



Apple MacBook
Air 13-inch

Samsung
Galaxy S5

Polk Audio
Nue Era

Fitbit One

Before you go

Get your gadgets ready for the trip.

- Using your phone for streaming and as a Wi-Fi hot spot for other gadgets could cause overages. Up the data allowance by a few gigabytes for the vacation month (\$10 to \$30). Switch back to your old plan after the trip.
- Overseas phone and data plans can be pricey. Check with your carrier to see what options exist. Or buy a disposable phone at your destination. You can be sure it will work there, and calls to the U.S. might be cheaper.
- Make room for photos, videos, and more by transferring or deleting files to free up memory on your gadgets.
- Download e-books, videos, and apps you want for the trip.
- Be careful when flying. Nine percent of vacationers we surveyed said their tablet, laptop, or digital camera was damaged in checked baggage, and 6 percent said it was stolen or lost. Also, 6 percent said it was damaged in overhead bins. Put devices in padded cases and cushion them in sweatshirts or other soft items.

What travelers take on vacation

63%
Smart phone

51%
Laptop

50%
Digital camera

48%
Headphones

39%
Tablet or e-book reader

37%
GPS device

32%
iPod or other MP3 player

7%
Action cam

Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center survey of 1,044 U.S. adults in April 2014.

Road trip



Apple iPad Mini with Retina display

Bose QuietComfort 20i

Tablet

Apple iPad Mini with Retina display, \$400 (Wi-Fi, 16GB, iOS)

This 7.9-inch tablet is a compact take-along that's big enough for you to enjoy videos, read books and magazines, play games, and surf the Web. It has a great high-res display and offers excellent performance plus access to iTunes and Apple's App Store. And its 12.8-hour battery life will keep the family entertained throughout a long day on the road.

Also consider Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 8.4, \$400 (Wi-Fi, 16GB, Android); Acer Iconia W4-820-2466, \$350 (Wi-Fi, 64GB, Windows)



Acer Iconia W4-820-2466

Headphones

Bose QuietComfort 20i, \$300

Want to block out the road noise and the roar of passing trucks while you're enjoying your music or movies? This is the best in-ear noise-canceling model we tested, with very good sound and excellent noise reduction.

Also consider If you want to spend less and don't need noise cancellation, check out the Polk Audio Nue Era, \$100, or the Klipsch Image S4i II, \$100.

Apps



GasBuddy, free (Android, iOS, and Windows)

Using reports from other travelers, GasBuddy finds the cheapest nearby gas when you're on the road in the U.S. and Canada. Win rewards and prizes for reporting gas prices.



iExit, free (Android and iOS)

Plan your pit stops with the help of this app, which lists food, gas, lodging, and other services at interstate exits and rest areas.



Google Maps, free (Android, iOS, and Windows)

Recently revamped, Google Maps now has downloadable maps of 220 countries and territories; transit directions and maps for more than 2,800 cities; live traffic conditions; automatic rerouting; and lane guidance. You can also search places to eat, shop, and play in unfamiliar cities.

HOW TO

Use free Wi-Fi. Restaurants such as Denny's, McDonald's, and Starbucks, and many hotels offer free wireless, so take advantage. Just remember those aren't secure connections, so don't do anything involving a credit card or personal data.

Set up your own hot spot. Use your phone as a personal Wi-Fi hot spot so that your other gadgets can get online when no Wi-Fi is available. Bonus: It's more secure than public Wi-Fi.

Hit the cloud. Set up a cloud account. Reliable services include Apple iCloud, Dropbox, Google Drive, and Microsoft OneDrive. Most offer a few gigabytes of free storage. Upload photos and videos as you go, and access content stored there, from anywhere.

Kids and technology

We asked Americans how they feel about children using gadgets on vacation.

37%

weren't too bothered by it

30%

think it's a great idea

18%

hate it but allow it

16%

say no way, no how

Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center survey of 1,044 U.S. adults in April 2014.

JVC GC-XA2
Adixxion

Samsung
Gear Fit

The great outdoors

Rugged action cam

JVC GC-XA2 Adixxion, \$275

Going white-water rafting? Capture the whole wet, wild journey. This wireless JVC has a rugged and waterproof body (unlike GoPro action cams, which must be inserted into their waterproof case). JVC claims this cam is waterproof to a depth of 16 feet and can withstand a 6½-foot drop. Bonus: It has a small built-in LCD, which is rare on an action cam.

Also consider GoPro Hero3+ Silver Edition, \$300; Garmin Virb, \$300

Fitness tracker

Samsung Gear Fit, \$200

This smart-watch/activity-band hybrid features a built-in heart monitor, accelerometer, gyroscope, and pedometer that will keep you on track as you're hiking in the Grand Canyon or kayaking along the Pacific coast. It's slim, sleek, and light, and the curved design fits comfortably on the wrist. Downside: It's fully functional only with certain Samsung phones.

Also consider Fitbit One activity tracker, \$100

Accessories

Mophie Juice Pack, \$100

This almost doubled battery life on the Samsung Galaxy S 4 in our tests. Models for other phones are available.

Joos Orange Portable Solar Power, \$150

This rugged, waterproof solar charger is claimed to generate 2 hours of 3G talk time for every 1 hour in sunlight.



Apps



Oh, Ranger! ParkFinder, free (Android and iOS)

Want to go bird-watching, waterskiing, or climbing? Using this app, enter your location, select from a list of activities, and find out where to go. The database includes state, national, and local parks.



Night Sky Lite, free (Android and iOS)

Now stargazers can commune with the constellations. Point your phone or tablet at the sky, and this app will identify the stars, planets, and galaxies that are mesmerizing you.

Problems encountered

Consumers faced these difficulties while outdoors or on a trip:

47%

Battery ran out of power

46%

Difficult to see the screen

19%

Device got dirty or sandy

9%

Device was dropped and damaged

9%

Device overheated

9%

Device was dropped in water or got wet

Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center survey of 1,044 U.S. adults in April 2014.

HOW TO

Conserve battery life. When you're far from a power source, lower screen brightness and turn off auto-updates. Use GPS sparingly. When there's no signal, turn off the phone or set it to airplane mode, which stops attempts to connect and turns off Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and mobile connections.

Dry out a wet phone. Do not turn it on to see whether it works. Remove the SIM card and, if accessible, the phone's back cover, battery, and memory card. Shake off water and wipe down parts. Stick them in a jar of uncooked rice. In a week, put the pieces together, push the power button, and hope for the best.

The airport and beyond



Beats by Dre
Beats Executive

Samsung Ativ
Book 9 Plus
NP940X3G-K06US

Sony Cyber-shot
DSC-RX10

Camera

Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX10, \$1,300

If you're taking that once-in-a-lifetime trip, consider an advanced camera, like this top-rated advanced point-and-shoot. It takes stunning photos and excellent video, and its high-quality viewfinder ensures that even in bright light, you'll see the shot you're composing.

Also consider Samsung NX30 mirrorless SLR-like, \$1,000; Canon Rebel T5 SLR, \$500

Headphones

Beats by Dre Beats Executive, \$300

Whether you're trying to block out the incessant drone of a jet engine or muffle the snoring of the guy in seat 16B, you'll be grateful for noise-canceling headphones like these. They have very good noise reduction and satisfying sound quality—this model topped our Ratings—plus a stylish look.

Also consider Bose QuietComfort 15, \$300; SMS Audio Street by 50 ANC, \$280; Monoprice Noise-Canceling Headphone 10010, \$110

Laptop

Samsung Ativ Book 9 Plus NP940X3G-K06US, \$1,300

This 13-inch touch-screen Windows laptop is an excellent performer that gets 9.75 hours of battery life—enough to last you from JFK to Heathrow and then some. At 3.1 pounds, it won't weigh down your carry-on. The very good display makes movies pop, and it has lots of oomph for gaming and video editing.

Also consider Apple MacBook Air 13-inch laptop, \$1,000; HP Split 13 g210dx x2 Convertible Ultrabook 13-inch Windows laptop with detachable tablet, \$800

Apps



Foodspotting, free (Android and iOS)

This app doesn't just find you places to eat wherever you travel—it helps you find the best dishes. Get the greatest pizza in Roma, paella in Barcelona, or buffalo wings in (where else?) Buffalo.



iTranslate, free (iOS); Google Translate, free (Android)

Both can translate words and phrases in about 80 languages.



XE Currency, free (Android and iOS)

Convert 180-plus foreign currencies so that you'll know exactly how much a souvenir will set you back.

How travelers size up airplane Wi-Fi

52%

had no
interruptions
in service

37%

had occasional
interruptions

8%

had frequent
interruptions

48%

had little or no
connectivity

Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center survey of more than 6,000 subscribers to ConsumerReports.org in March 2014.

HOW TO

Be security smart. When you run your devices through the security check, keep them in sight. Don't put them on the belt until you're ready to walk through the scanner.

Skip insurance. Very few people in our previous surveys bought a new phone because the old one broke or was lost or stolen. Premiums run \$4 to \$8 per month, deductibles can be \$100 or more, and the replacement phone might be refurbished.

Use Wi-Fi rather than 3G/4G.

Cellular roaming fees can be astronomical, so use hotel or airport Wi-Fi or your phone's Wi-Fi connection to communicate with the folks back home. Just don't reveal anything confidential on a public network.

Geotag photos. That will help you remember where you shot those stunning ruins. But beware of posting photos publicly, as viewers can see the location and know you're not at home.



Nikon Coolpix AW120

Sony Xperia Z1S

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite with Special Offers

At the beach

Water-resistant phones

Sony Xperia Z1S and Samsung Galaxy S 5, prices vary by carrier and plan

These sleek phones are designed to survive a 30-minute dunk in about 5 and 3 feet of water, respectively, and laugh off wind-swept sand. Their cameras work underwater, so you can take pictures and videos of that school of fish. And these recommended models handle traditional smart-phone tasks as competently as their landlubber cousins. The Xperia Z1S has one of the best video cameras we've seen on a phone, and the fully loaded Galaxy S 5 has a heart-rate monitor and fitness app—handy if you muster up the energy to sprint along the shore.

Waterproof camera

Nikon Coolpix AW120, \$300

Scuba divers and klutzes, rejoice: This rugged camera is designed to be waterproof to a depth of 59 feet and to withstand a drop from 6½ feet. It has among the widest optical-zoom lenses in its class (24 mm to 120 mm) and a maximum aperture of f/2.8, so it should perform well in low light—which is what you'll encounter in the deep blue sea.

Also consider Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS5, \$275; Sony Cyber-shot DSC-TX30, \$200

E-book reader

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite with Special Offers, \$120

If you love to read on the beach, leave the tablet at home and pack an e-book reader. The Kindle has excellent readability in all kinds of light, including bright sunlight, and the battery lasts about eight weeks, so one charge can last the whole vacation. It's small and light, and page turns are fast and smooth.

Also consider Barnes & Noble Nook GlowLight, \$120

Apps



Tides Near Me, free (Android

and iOS) Keep track of high and low tides, as well as when the sun and moon will rise and set.



Yahoo Weather, free

(Android and iOS) Check the UV index, radar maps, and forecasts galore.

HOW TO

Shoot underwater photos

- Double-check that the camera's battery and other compartments are tightly closed.
- Use underwater scene or shooting modes that will optimize the exposure for dim undersea settings.
- Take extra photos. Even with goggles on, it can be hard to see the LCD to compose a photo, so shoot multiples.
- Know how deep you can go. Some cameras are rated to only 5 feet, others to 50 or 60 feet. Review your camera's specs to see how far underwater the manufacturer claims it can go.
- Strap it on. Make sure the camera's tether is wrapped around your wrist so that you don't lose it when a wave hits or when you're paddling through the surf.

The 13-cent solution

Be prepared to protect your gear: Nine percent of those surveyed said a gadget got wet while they were outdoors or on vacation, and 19 percent said it got dirty or sandy. There are many pricey waterproof cases, but we've found that a quart-size Hefty Slider Bag with a zipper does just as well at keeping salt, grit, and water away from your device. And food-storage bags cost just 10 to 13 cents each. **Bonus:** Bagged gadgets should float (as long as there's air inside the bag), and you can talk on a phone or read a text through clear plastic.



Back-to-school bests

Our top picks for tablets and laptops—for all ages

STUDENTS NEED a lot more than pencils and notebooks in today's classrooms: The way they learn has changed radically since computers and the Internet arrived. As educator and tech advocate Vicki Davis told us, "Tablets and laptops are the new paper, the new textbook, and the new podium from which teachers share with their classes." Education expert Nicholas Provenzano (*thenerdyteacher.com*) agrees: "It is crucial for students to have access to the best technology tools for their education." With that in mind, we present these five recommended devices to help prepare your favorite student for every stage of a modern, high-tech education.



Microsoft Surface Pro 3
with Core i5 processor

PHOTO: TRAVIS RATHBONE; PROP STYLING: WENDY SCHELAH FOR HALLEY RESOURCES

Kindergarten

Samsung Galaxy Tab Kids, \$200

Before they can use a keyboard and mouse, children easily master the touch-and-swipe logic of a tablet. This Android model comes with a protective bumper, and parents can approve the kidcentric content, such as interactive e-books and education-focused games, and set playtime limits (just note that Internet security is limited to turning the built-in browser on and off). Battery life is an impressive 9.3 hours, so kids can learn and play almost all day.



Elementary school

Acer C720-2848 Chromebook, \$200

Many schools are embracing Google's Chromebook platform (the lightweight laptops now account for one in four devices purchased in K-12 education), and some schools are using Chromebook laptops to deploy Common Core tests—which is a powerful argument for getting your kid started on the platform at home as well. This Acer scored highly in our lab tests. At 2.7 pounds, the 11.6-inch device is highly portable, and it delivers 10-plus hours of battery life. The Acer can be set up by a parent to give children "Supervised User" accounts (a Chromebook feature) to restrict adult content on the Web.



Middle school to high school

Lenovo IdeaPad Flex 14, \$650

Serious homework demands a serious computer. Lenovo's strangely flexible yet highly capable laptop has a hinge that rotates the screen 300 degrees to stand up the device like a pup tent and take better advantage of its 14-inch touch screen. And it's an awful lot of laptop for the money—it has a 500GB hard drive, its fourth-generation Intel Core i5 delivers excellent performance, and it has lots of gee-whiz goodies such as facial recognition, as well as voice and gesture control. Plus, at 4.1 pounds, it's lightweight for a laptop of this size—a plus when your kid's backpack is already laden with textbooks.



College

For the graphic design major

MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina display and 128GB, \$1,300

Most college-bound kids can get by with the same machine they used through high school, but a higher education in the visual arts can require a bit more horsepower. With a stunning 2560x1600-pixel display, excellent processing performance, and more than 11 hours of battery life, the MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina display is about as premium a laptop as you can get, and its price reflects that. Nevertheless, for art professionals (and soon-to-be-professionals) who run graphics-intensive programs such as Adobe's Creative Suite or Autodesk Maya, the MacBook Pro is the gold standard (although for those applications, Apple's starter 128-gigabyte solid-state drive is pretty skimpy). And buying with Apple's education discount brings the price down to \$1,200.

For the double major

Microsoft Surface Pro 3 with Core i5 processor and 128GB, \$1,000

Students deciding on a new computer before departing for college are facing a dilemma: laptop or tablet? Microsoft conceived Surface as the ultimate bridge between the two types of devices. The Pro 3 is the most laptoplike Surface yet, and with a large 12-inch, 2160x1440-pixel touch-screen display and adjustable kickstand, it can live comfortably on a lap. The Surface Pro 3's backlit Type Cover can magnetically prop up at an angle, which may make typing easier, although it's a shame that the \$130 accessory is not included with the base price. Business students will appreciate that the Surface Pro 3 runs full Windows desktop productivity applications, and creative types will enjoy the pen interface that lets you draw or write directly on the screen. The Surface Pro 2 did very well in our laptop lab tests; at press time, we were testing this updated, larger model.



Best companies to fix a failed computer

Apple and independent shops rate well in our survey

YOU SIT DOWN to work on your home computer, turn it on, and ... nothing happens. Or things move so slowly that you feel as if you could run a 5K before an application launches. Time to call tech support.

For users of Windows PCs, that's often not a happy moment. According to our survey of more than 4,400 owners of laptops, desktops, and Chromebooks, Dell—which was tied for the top among the Windows PC manufacturers—solved just 60 percent of users' problems. Although that's dismal, it's better than the other companies' records. For example, Acer and Toshiba solved only about 40 percent of problems. Phone and online support were rated inferior across all brands of Windows computers.

It's a whole different story when it comes to Apple computers. As in years past, the company shines when it comes to helping Mac users troubleshoot. Apple's phone and online support solved 81 percent of its users' problems, our survey shows, and earned high marks across the board.

Unlike with Windows computers, which generally get about a year of free tech support, Apple provides only 90 days of free phone support to Mac users. But the company ends up consistently at the top of our tech-support Ratings, possibly because it takes that valuable asset—tech support—and gives it away free over the life of the product at Apple stores, says Van Baker, research vice president for the Gartner Group, a research firm based in Stamford, Conn.

Ratings Retailers

In order of reader score.

Retailer	Reader score	Percentage of problems solved
	0	100
Apple's Genius Bar	85	86%
Local independent shops	81	87
Best Buy's Geek Squad	73	77
Staples' EasyTech	67	70

Guide to the Ratings

Ratings are based on responses from 3,054 visits to a retailer's in-house technical-support service for computers. **Respondents** were ConsumerReports.org subscribers surveyed online in January 2014. **Data** are based on respondents' most recent experience(s) with a retailer's technical-support service between January 2013 and December 2013. **Reader score** represents overall satisfaction with the retailer. A score of 100 would mean that respondents were "completely satisfied." A score of 80 indicates that respondents were "very satisfied"; 60, "fairly well satisfied"; and 40, "somewhat dissatisfied." Differences of fewer than 3 points are not meaningful. **Problem solved** indicates whether computer problems were solved by retailers' in-house-based technical support. Differences of fewer than 8 percentage points in percentage of problems solved are not meaningful.













"Even as much as Apple invests in making their technology easy to understand, people still have questions," Baker says. "And when you give that valuable tech support away for free, people are delighted." Apple users love the company's Genius Bar, the free walk-in service provided at Apple stores, where 86 percent of user problems were solved.

Third-party support for Windows computers from Best Buy and Staples didn't fare as well as Apple. Still, those companies' success rates solving user problems were higher than those of the manufacturers of Windows PCs. And independent computer stores were actually on par with the Genius Bar. The takeaway: If you're a Windows user with a problem, that local, indy computer shop on the corner could be just what you need.

Ratings Manufacturers

In order of reader score.

Better     Worse

Manufacturer	Reader score	Survey results		
		Phone support	Online support	Percentage of problems solved
	0			100
Apple	85			81%
Lenovo	62			58
Dell	62			60
Asus	57	—	—	51
HP/Compaq	56			50
Toshiba	54			42
Acer/Gateway/eMachines	51			41

Guide to the Ratings

Ratings are based on responses from 4,456 owners of 5,292 desktop, laptop, and Chromebook computers. **Respondents** were ConsumerReports.org subscribers surveyed online in January 2014. **Data** are based on respondents' most recent experience(s) contacting a manufacturer's technical-support service between January 2013 and December 2013. **Reader score** represents overall satisfaction and is not exclusively determined by the factors under survey results. A score of 100 would mean that respondents were "completely satisfied". A score of 80 indicates that respondents were "very satisfied"; 60, "fairly well satisfied"; and 40, "somewhat dissatisfied." Differences of fewer than 7 points are not meaningful. The ratings listed under survey results reflect how respondents rated each manufacturer. Phone support and online support were calculated on a scale of Very Poor to Excellent. **Online support** was rated by those respondents who contacted a manufacturer via a website, e-mail, or an online live-chat or video-chat program. **Problem solved** indicates whether computer problems were solved by manufacturer-based technical support. Differences of fewer than 11 percentage points in percentage of problems solved are not meaningful. A dash (—) indicates that sufficient data was not available to report a rating.

Great for You Great for Us

You receive income for life through our Consumer Reports Charitable Gift Annuity program. With a donation of \$10,000 or more to Consumer Reports, you will receive very favorable, fixed rate annuity payments for your lifetime(s) that are unaffected by economic downturns.

We receive funding to help us test products and services and inform consumers with our unbiased reports. Your contribution helps us to maintain our no-advertising policies.



Single Life	Yearly Rate
62	4.5%
73	5.5
81	7.0
90	9.0

Two Lives	Yearly Rate
76/73	5.0%
83/80	6.0

Contact us for additional rates and deferred annuity information.

Your **charitable donation** is eligible for certain **tax benefits** and a portion of your annuity payments may be tax free. In addition, you will receive a lifetime subscription to Consumer Reports.

For more information, please return the no-obligation slip or call Ed Pitaro for a confidential personal benefits profile: **914-378-2647**

This is not legal advice. Any prospective donor should seek the advice of a qualified estate and/or tax professional to determine the consequences of his/her gift.

Tell me more about the Consumer Reports Charitable Gift AnnuitySM

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Date(s) of Birth _____

E-mail _____ Telephone _____

I am thinking of donating _____ to establish my Consumer Reports Charitable Gift Annuity.

Mail to: Ed Pitaro • Consumer Reports • 101 Truman Avenue • Yonkers, NY • 10703 or e-mail to epitaro@consumer.org or fax to: 914-378-2916

0814AFR



Where should you go for heart surgery?

Our new Ratings of more than 400 hospitals can help you find the right one

LAST SPRING, when Zvi Frankel's grandfather learned that a valve in his heart needed to be replaced, he turned to his grandson for help.

The grandfather, who lives in New York City, had to choose between the standard open-heart surgery and a less invasive, high-tech version. The new option, called transcatheter aortic valve replacement, was appealing. He wouldn't have to be placed on a heart-lung machine or have his heart temporarily stopped.

But Frankel and his grandfather wanted to know more. Which worked best long term? Which was safer? And most important, which hospitals and surgeons had the best results? "Doesn't everyone want to know that when they face something as serious as heart surgery?" Frankel asks.

Well, most people probably do want that information. But, as Frankel found out, getting it is far from easy. In fact, Frankel embarked on what turned into a long quest, ending with him writing an article in *JAMA Internal Medicine* on how difficult it was for consumers to find needed information.

Along the way he found that many hospitals were eager to talk about the benefits of the new procedure, which involves inserting an artificial valve through an incision in the groin and threading it up an artery to the heart. Several hospitals even promoted it in ads or website videos, such as one we found from New York-Presbyterian hospital in New York City narrated by Mehmet Oz, M.D., director of the hospital's Cardiovascular Institute.

But the hospitals and surgeons could not or would not tell Frankel what he most wanted to know. It took weeks poring over medical journals to learn that the limited research to date suggests that although the procedure can be the only option for some very sick people, it may be more likely than the traditional approach to cause some serious complications. He found that those increased risks included the need for a pacemaker and death from aortic regurgitation, triggered when blood leaks around the new valve and back into the heart.

Most difficult was learning how well particular doctors and hospitals performed. In

fact, he ended up filing a Freedom of Information Act request with New York state to get success rates for the doctors and hospitals they were considering. Ultimately, his grandfather chose the traditional approach, performed by a surgeon with a good track record at Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York City, according to the data from the state registry. The surgery was a success.

"It shouldn't be so hard," says John Santa, M.D., medical director of Consumer Reports Health, who helped Frankel publish his article. "Not everyone has a grandson like Zvi to act as a full-time medical detective. Hospitals and doctors should make the information accessible and understandable, so families can make informed choices when they make life and death decisions."

Our first ever Ratings of hospitals for heart surgery (see page 34) are an attempt to help you do just that.

Opening up heart data

We rate hospitals on two heart surgeries: surgical aortic valve replacement, the kind chosen by Frankel's grandfather; and

coronary artery bypass graft surgery, an equally serious operation done to treat blocked coronary arteries.

The Ratings are based on the gold standard in tracking hospital performance: data from patients' medical records showing whether patients survived the procedure and how they fared on other important measures, including complications. To create a level playing field, the data are adjusted for the health of patients because certain hospitals treat more older, sicker patients than others.

The information comes from the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, which represents physicians who operate on the heart and other organs in the chest. The STS has collected the data for several decades. More than 1,000 U.S. hospitals report to the STS, but only about 400 allowed the organization to share the data with us.

"All hospitals know this information,"

Santa says. "Those that have agreed to share, especially those with low scores, should be applauded for their commitment to transparency. Those that haven't shared should make it available—otherwise, it seems like they have something to hide."

What we found

Here are some of our main findings:

- Certain famous hospitals are missing. They aren't in our Ratings because they don't share data with us, the STS, or both. That includes two hospitals Frankel's grandfather considered, Columbia-Presbyterian and Weill Cornell. Also on that list: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.
- Top hospitals are in surprising places. Only 15 hospitals in our Ratings earned top scores in heart-valve and bypass surgeries. Although the well-known Cleveland Clinic

made the list, so did some less familiar hospitals, such as Borgess Medical Center in Kalamazoo, Mich., and Mother Frances Hospital-Tyler in Tyler, Texas. Some are major medical centers; others are smaller. "It's not name or location or ad budget that matters; it's a commitment to quality, and that can happen anywhere," Santa says.

- Performance varies widely, even at neighboring hospitals. We found five metropolitan areas—Detroit, Indianapolis, Los

Top-scoring hospitals

Only 15 of the hospitals that share their data with us earned top marks in bypass and valve surgeries (listed alphabetically):

- Baystate Medical Center, Springfield, Mass.
- Borgess Medical Center, Kalamazoo, Mich.
- Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland
- Kaiser Permanente Sunnyside Medical Center, Clackamas, Ore.
- Kaleida Health, Buffalo, N.Y.
- Mother Frances Hospital-Tyler, Tyler, Texas
- Sequoia Hospital, Redwood City, Calif.
- Spectrum Health-Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Mich.
- St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Ypsilanti, Mich.
- St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center, Syracuse, N.Y.
- St. Vincent Heart Center of Indiana, Indianapolis
- Swedish Medical Center-Cherry Hill Campus, Seattle
- The Heart Hospital Baylor Plano, Plano, Texas
- UMass Memorial Medical Center, Worcester, Mass.
- Valley Hospital, Ridgewood, N.J.

6 questions to help you find a heart hospital

1. Isn't heart surgery an emergency, so do I have time to research hospitals?

If you are having a heart attack, emergency bypass surgery is sometimes necessary. But in most cases heart disease can be stabilized with drugs or simpler procedures, giving you, or a friend or family member, time. Ask your doctor how serious your condition is and how soon you'll need surgery. Valve disease is serious but rarely an emergency, so you will almost always have time.

2. What should I do if my hospital isn't rated?

There's a good chance of that happening, because many hospitals did not share data with us. But almost every hospital reports to the Society of Thoracic Surgeons even if the information is not public. Some that do report to the STS give similar data to state registries. So ask your surgeon about the hospital's survival and complication rates. If he or she can't—or won't—share it, consider looking elsewhere.

3. What should I do if no top hospitals are in my community?

First, don't panic. A hospital that gets an average rating still provides good care. If all hospitals in your area get low scores or won't share their data, you could travel elsewhere. But check with your insurance to make sure the procedure will be covered at the out-of-town hospital. And realize that you might not have as much support from family and friends. If you choose a lower-rated hospital, discuss your concerns about its score

with your surgeon. That can be reassuring and help you prepare for your stay.

4. Do I need to go to a famous hospital or one in a large city to get good care?

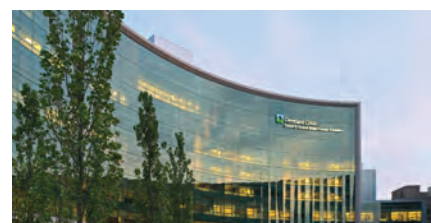
No. We found top hospitals in bypass and valve surgery in out-of-the-way places. And high-scoring hospitals in one or the other procedure are in all regions of the country.

5. What if my insurer won't cover the hospital I want?

If you have original Medicare, you should have no problem, because almost all hospitals accept it. With managed care, including Medicare Advantage, you must use providers in the plan's network or you're likely to pay all or most of the costs out of your own pocket. If the surgery can be postponed for several months, you could consider switching plans for 2015. That may not be possible if you're covered through a job, but if you have Medicare Advantage or a plan you bought through a state marketplace, you can switch plans during the annual fall open enrollment period.

6. What if I also want information about my heart surgeon?

That can be difficult to find. Subscribers to our website can see Ratings for heart surgery groups (go to ConsumerReports.org/hearturgerygroups) but not individual doctors. A few states maintain registries for surgeons. (Contact your state's department of health.) But you probably will need to ask your surgeon for the information you want. If he or she won't tell you, consider going elsewhere.



Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland



Mother Frances Hospital-Tyler, Tyler, Texas

Angeles, Oklahoma City, and Portland, Ore.—where there are top- and low-scoring hospitals, sometimes just miles apart. “In those communities, the hospital you choose can really make a difference,” Santa says.

- Many hospitals do a good job. Of the hospitals that shared their bypass data with us, 20 percent (83) were above average, 75 percent (310) were average, and 5 percent (19) were below average. The STS has high standards, so hospitals with average scores still do a very good job, says Robbin Cohen, M.D., an associate professor of cardiothoracic surgery at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California and a member of the STS. Of the 248 hospitals with data on valve surgery, 10 percent (25) got a top score, 88 percent (217) a middle score, and 2 percent (6) the lowest one.

The risks of heart surgery

No one undergoes heart surgery lightly.

Bypass is usually reserved for people with multiple coronary arteries blocked with plaque, which increases the risk of heart attack and causes chest pain and shortness of breath. During the procedure, the surgeon opens the chest, removes part of a healthy vein or artery from another part of the body, and grafts one end of it below the clog and the other end above it, allowing blood flow to bypass the blockage.

Aortic valve replacement is mostly done when the valve in the heart’s left chamber accumulates calcium deposits, obstructing blood flow. Over time, the heart fails as it struggles to keep blood pumping.

Even in the hands of skilled surgeons at good hospitals, the procedures can sometimes lead to heart attack, kidney failure, or other problems. After surgery, patients are put on a ventilator, which increases the risk of complications, including pneumonia and other infections.

“No surgeon and no hospital can do heart surgery with zero complications and zero deaths,” Cohen says. “Patients undergo heart surgery because the benefits outweigh the risks.” But as our Ratings show, results vary among hospitals. So which hospital you choose matters.

Frankel ultimately got enough information to make a decision, but he says that efforts such as our new heart Ratings would have helped. When confronting surgery, people need to know they are making a decision based on facts, Frankel says. “You can choose the best doctor and best hospital, and you still may not have positive results,” he says. “But people should be able to know they did everything they possibly could.”

Ratings Hospitals for heart surgery

Hospitals in our Ratings that earned a top score in either bypass or heart-valve surgery. In alphabetical order, within state and region.

	Hospital name	City	Heart bypass surgery	Aortic valve replacement surgery
NORTHEAST				
Massachusetts	Baystate Medical Center	Springfield	●	●
	Brigham and Women's Hospital	Boston	○	●
	Lahey Hospital & Medical Center, Burlington	Burlington	●	○
	Massachusetts General Hospital	Boston	○	●
	Mount Auburn Hospital	Cambridge	●	○
	UMass Memorial Medical Center	Worcester	●	●
New Hampshire	Catholic Medical Center	Manchester	●	○
New Jersey	Morristown Medical Center	Morristown	●	○
	Valley Hospital	Ridgewood	●	●
New York	Albany Medical Center	Albany	○	●
	Kaleida Health	Buffalo	●	●
	Mercy Hospital	Buffalo	●	○
	Montefiore Medical Center	Bronx	●	○
	Rochester General Hospital	Rochester	●	○
	St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center	Syracuse	●	●
Pennsylvania	Excelsa Health Westmoreland Hospital	Greensburg	●	○
	Lankenau Medical Center	Wynnewood	●	○
	Lehigh Valley Hospital	Allentown	○	●
	Pinnacle Health System	Harrisburg	●	—
	The Good Samaritan Hospital	Lebanon	●	○
	Wilkes-Barre General Hospital	Wilkes-Barre	●	—
	York Hospital	York	●	—
SOUTH				
District of Columbia	MedStar Washington Hospital Center	Washington	●	—
Florida	Memorial Regional Hospital	Hollywood	●	○
	Munroe Regional Medical Center	Ocala	●	—
	Sarasota Memorial Hospital	Sarasota	●	○
	St. Joseph's Hospital	Tampa	●	—
	Venice Regional Medical Center	Venice	●	○
	Winter Haven Hospital	Winter Haven	●	○
Georgia	WellStar Kennestone Hospital	Marietta	●	—
Kentucky	Baptist Health Paducah	Paducah	●	—
	King's Daughters Medical Center	Ashland	●	—
Maryland	Washington Adventist Hospital	Takoma Park	●	—
North Carolina	Carolinas Medical Center	Charlotte	●	○
	Cone Health	Greensboro	●	○
	Duke University Hospital	Durham	○	●
	High Point Regional Health System	High Point	●	—
	Mission Hospital	Asheville	●	—
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Heart Hospital	Oklahoma City	●	—
South Carolina	Providence Hospital	Columbia	●	●
Tennessee	Johnson City Medical Center	Johnson City	●	○
	Parkwest Medical Center	Knoxville	●	○
	Saint Thomas West Hospital	Nashville	●	○
	Wellmont Bristol Regional Medical Center	Bristol	●	○
	Mother Frances Hospital-Tyler	Tyler	●	●
Texas	The Heart Hospital Baylor Plano	Plano	●	●
	Inova Fairfax Hospital	Falls Church	●	—
	Mary Washington Hospital	Fredericksburg	●	○
	University of Virginia Medical Center	Charlottesville	○	●



	Hospital name	City	Heart bypass surgery	Aortic valve replacement surgery
MIDWEST				
Illinois	Advocate Christ Medical Center	Oak Lawn	●	○
	Advocate Condell Medical Center	Libertyville	●	○
	Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital	Downers Grove	●	○
	Advocate Sherman Hospital	Elgin	●	○
	Central DuPage Hospital	Winfield	●	—
	SwedishAmerican Hospital	Rockford	●	—
Indiana	Franciscan St. Francis Health-Indianapolis	Indianapolis	●	○
	Indiana University Health Bloomington Hospital	Bloomington	●	○
	Parkview Regional Medical Center	Fort Wayne	●	○
	St. Vincent Heart Center of Indiana	Indianapolis	●	●
	Stormont-Vail HealthCare	Topeka	●	—
Michigan	Borgess Medical Center	Kalamazoo	●	●
	Crittenton Hospital Medical Center	Rochester	●	○
	Genesys Regional Medical Center	Grand Blanc	●	○
	Henry Ford Hospital	Detroit	●	○
	Henry Ford Macomb Hospitals	Clinton Township	●	○
	McLaren Bay Region	Bay City	●	—
	McLaren Northern Michigan	Petoskey	●	○
	Spectrum Health-Grand Rapids	Grand Rapids	●	●
	St. John Maccomb-Oakland Hospital	Warren	●	○
	St. Joseph Mercy Hospital	Ypsilanti	●	●
	University of Michigan Hospitals and Health Centers	Ann Arbor	○	●
Minnesota	St. Cloud Hospital	Saint Cloud	●	—
Missouri	Boone Hospital Center	Columbia	●	○
	Missouri Baptist Medical Center	Saint Louis	○	●
Nebraska	Bryan Medical Center	Lincoln	●	○
	Nebraska Heart Hospital	Lincoln	●	○
Ohio	Aultman Hospital	Canton	●	○
	Cleveland Clinic	Cleveland	●	●
	Mount Carmel East	Columbus	●	○
Wisconsin	Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center	La Crosse	●	○
WEST				
Arizona	University of Arizona Medical Center-University Campus	Tucson	●	○
California	Mercy Medical Center Redding	Redding	●	○
	Mission Hospital	Mission Viejo	●	○
	Ronald Reagan University of California Los Angeles Medical Center	Los Angeles	○	●
	Sequoia Hospital	Redwood City	●	●
	St. Joseph's Medical Center	Stockton	●	○
	St. Jude Medical Center	Fullerton	●	—
	Stanford Hospital and Clinics	Palo Alto	○	●
New Mexico	Presbyterian Hospital	Albuquerque	●	—
Oregon	Kaiser Permanente Sunnyside Medical Center	Clackamas	●	●
Utah	McKay-Dee Hospital Center	Ogden	●	—
	Utah Valley Regional Medical Center	Provo	●	○
Washington	Swedish Medical Center-Cherry Hill Campus	Seattle	●	●

How we rate hospitals on heart surgery

The data come from the Society of Thoracic Surgeons for hospitals that have agreed to share their data with us.

BYPASS SURGERY RATINGS Reflects a hospital's performance in isolated coronary artery bypass graft surgery, including the open-heart approach and less invasive versions. Overall score is a composite of four measures: survival (percentage of patients who leave the hospital and survive at least 30 days after surgery), complications (percentage of patients who avoid the most serious complications, including needing a second operation, developing a deep chest infection, suffering a stroke or kidney failure, and requiring prolonged ventilation), best surgical technique (percentage of patients who receive at least one graft from an internal mammary artery, located under the breastbone, which improves survival), and right drugs (percentage of patients who receive beta-blockers before and after surgery to control blood pressure and heart rhythm, aspirin to prevent blood clots, and a drug after surgery to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol).

VALVE REPLACEMENT RATING Reflects a hospital's performance in surgical aortic valve replacement. Does not include data for transcatheter aortic valve replacement, though the STS has started to collect it. Overall score is a composite of two measures: survival (percentage of patients who leave the hospital and survive at least 30 days after surgery) and complications (percentage of patients who avoid the most serious complications, which are the same as for bypass).

All data were adjusted based on the health of patients. Still, limitations of such adjustments can make direct comparisons difficult.

MORE INFORMATION For details on our methodology, go to ConsumerReports.org/cro/howweratehospitals. For our complete hospital Ratings, subscribers to our website can go to ConsumerReports.org/hospitalratings.

GET INVOLVED

If your hospital is not in our Ratings, you can help change that. Contact your surgeon, the head of the hospital's cardiac department, and the hospital's CEO. Say that they should report their heart data to the Society of Thoracic Surgeons and that they should let the STS share the data with us. In addition, join our Safe Patient Project (safepatientproject.org), which uses the power of thousands of patient advocates to push for safer hospitals and transparent medical information.



PRICEY PAIR The LG WM8500HVA washer and DLEX8500V dryer offer top performance for top dollar. See 'Sticker Shock,' on the facing page.

YOUR ULTIMATE laundry guide

How to find the best washer and dryer, keep your old ones humming, and get your clothes clean and wrinkle-free

THE GOOD NEWS THIS YEAR: The best washers and dryers we've tested use less water and energy to remove tough stains and dry clothes. They also hold much more laundry, are stylish, and are quiet enough to place near bedrooms or the family room.

But not everything in 2014 is an improvement. That performance power translates into longer wash cycles, up to 115 minutes, because it takes longer to wash well with less water. Prices have also increased as manufacturers load washers and dryers with more cycles and increase capacity. It's easy to find models that cost \$1,000 or more each. But you don't have to spend that much to get great performance. Check out our shopping tips in "Sticker Shock: The \$1,600 Washer," on the facing page, and our picks, on page 38.

Some newer features, such as a steam option, make good advertising copy but increase cleaning only slightly and don't remove wrinkles in the dryer. Others features really do make doing laundry easier. Auto load sensing is terrific because it figures out just how much water is necessary for each load. Auto temp control adjusts the water to the appropriate temperature, and auto dispensers

release detergent, bleach, and fabric softener at the right time. Jumbo capacities let you wash more things at once so that you can do laundry less often. (A machine now needs to hold about 25 or more pounds of laundry to earn an Excellent score for capacity in our Ratings.) But not everyone needs to wash 12 to 15 pairs of men's jeans at once. Nor can you just stuff everything into the same load and get great results.

Wondering whether your wash is done? Some washers and dryers from LG, Samsung, and Whirlpool let you start and monitor cycles via an app on your smart phone—no need to run up and down stairs. And some Kenmore, LG, and Samsung models let you use your smart phone to diagnose washer problems. For Kenmore and LG, just dial an 800 number, put your smart phone over the washer's power button, and push the button, and your machine sends information to a company rep who may be able to solve the problem without having to come to your house. Samsung's app recognizes the error message displayed on the control panel and provides a remedy for the problem. It's no surprise, though, that "smart" features are usually available on pretty pricey machines.

Sticker shock: The \$1,600 washer

Why are appliances so expensive?

Our top-rated front-loader from LG (shown on the facing page) has 14 cycles, holds about 26 pounds of laundry, and comes in eye-catching graphite stainless steel, but it costs \$1,600. That's \$3,200 if you also buy the matching dryer, and \$3,800 if you add optional pedestals to raise the machines by almost 14 inches so that you don't have to bend as much to load and unload laundry. Blame the rising cost of manufacturing and transportation, as well as much larger capacities, stainless-steel drums, added cycles and features, and even improved styling. More washers and dryers are now conveniently placed near the hub of the home—the kitchen or family room—and front-loaders and dryers are neatly stacked in closets near bedrooms or home offices.

Save money by following these tips: Specialty cycles take out the

guesswork, but they also up the price. Our tests have found that basic cycles can handle most laundry chores, and our surveys have found that most subscribers use the normal cycles most of the time anyway. So ask yourself if you really want to pay for a dedicated bedding cycle to wash your sheets and comforters, or a special cycle for your jeans.

Before you shop, look online for rebates and special offers from manufacturers, retailers, and utilities. Then haggle to bring down the price, or have delivery or installation costs waived or lowered. If the price is still too high, search manufacturers' online outlets, which sell overstocked and discontinued models. But see how the models did in our tests or the brand's performance history. Remember, they're only a bargain if they do their job.

If you don't want to buy

How to extend the life of your washer and dryer:

WASHER

- Make sure that it's level, which helps to prevent vibration.
- Remove grit from the screens where hoses attach to the water supply to improve water flow into the machine.
- Use the right type of detergent and the proper amount. A surplus of suds makes the washer work harder. It can also trigger extra rinse cycles, extending wash time.
- Wash larger loads rather than more frequent smaller ones to save wear and tear on the machine.
- Don't overfill the washer; check the manufacturer's recommended capacity. Regularly overstuffing it could shorten its life.

DRYER

- Remove lint from the filter after each use to keep air flowing freely.
- Check the exhaust duct periodically. As it fills with lint, the dryer may take longer to dry clothes, and that uses more energy.
- Clean the exhaust duct yearly to prevent clogging and fires.
- Replace plastic or foil dryer ducts. They can sag and let lint build up at low points. Metal ducts, either flexible or solid ones, are far safer because they don't sag.

Five things to know before you shop

Here's what's different about the latest machines:

1 Better efficiency but longer wash times. The most efficient washers save roughly \$1,400 over a decade and use about 110,000 fewer gallons of water than a 10-year-old conventional top-loader with a center agitator. They're also better at extracting water, so drying time and your electrical costs are cut. And most of those washers clean well. But costs have risen and wash cycles are longer, 65 to 115 minutes, with front-loaders taking longer than top-loaders. That's why more washers offer a quick cycle, usually for lightly soiled loads or smaller ones, or an option that cuts normal wash time for regular-sized loads. Our tests have found that Kenmore's Accela-Wash, LG's TurboWash, and Samsung's SuperSpeed trimmed the wash time of full loads by about 15 to 20 minutes without sacrificing performance.

2 Washers are deeper or wider. To help cut down on the amount of time you spend doing laundry, manufacturers have increased capacity. One way is to make the tub deeper in high-efficiency (HE) top-loaders—and some washers are also taller now—making it difficult for shorter people to retrieve laundry at the bottom. When shopping, reach into the washer. If you'll need tongs to grab a sock, consider another model. Many machines also may be wider than

models made 10 years ago. So if space is tight, measure before you buy.

3 Waterproof items can cause problems. HE top-loaders spin faster and extract more water than regular top-loaders, but water can get trapped in rain jackets and other waterproof or water-resistant items. And as the spin cycle gets going, the load can become unbalanced and cause the machine to shake too much, even damaging the washer and laundry area.

Maytag and Whirlpool say that their HE top-loaders can handle waterproof items. LG's manuals warn against washing such items, but the company told us that if we did, we should use the low-spin or no-spin mode. Samsung suggests the same for new models without the Waterproof cycle, which prevented the washer from becoming unbalanced when we washed several waterproof jackets. Kenmore told us to follow the manual's advice on using the bulky cycle but not to wash waterproof items in Kenmore Elite models. Bottom line: Go online to check the owners' manual before you buy.

4 High-efficiency dryers? Not yet. Unlike washers, dryers have usually used similar amounts of energy, even so-called HE dryers, according to Energy Star. But that may be changing. You may soon see

Energy Star-qualified dryers in stores. LG's EcoHybrid DLHX4072 electric dryer combines conventional vented drying with a heat pump to reduce energy by recycling heat generated during drying. LG says that energy use is cut by around 50 percent using the most efficient settings. It's due to arrive in the U.S. sometime this summer and will cost about \$1,600. We'll buy and test it.

5 You may not need a new dryer after all. Though they may look different, many new dryers work similarly to ones made a decade ago. They use moisture sensors, which detect how damp the laundry is and adjust drying time to match. So if your current dryer has a sensor and you don't mind that the washer and dryer look different, you can save some money by keeping your old dryer until it breaks.

Keep this in mind though: Dryers that have sensors are designed to handle full loads. When you toss in just a few items, the dryer might shut off before the clothes are dry because the items didn't touch the sensor frequently enough. So use a timed cycle for drying small loads. And skip dryers with thermostats, which keep drying for a set amount of time even if clothes are dry sooner. Those models can overdry clothes, and they use more energy.

Our picks for pairs

We've highlighted matching washers and dryers because that's how many people buy them, but these can be bought separately, too.

IF MONEY IS NO OBJECT

A1 LG \$1,600 and **C3 LG** \$1,600

A2 Kenmore \$1,200 and
C15 Kenmore \$1,200

A3 Maytag \$1,300 and
C11 Maytag \$1,300

B1 LG \$1,200 and **C14 LG** \$1,200

In addition to being great at cleaning and drying, these models are quiet enough to be placed near bedrooms. Among front-loaders, **A1** and its matching dryer have one of the largest capacities tested and 14 cycles, including Jumbo for king-sized items, a TurboWash option that cuts 20 minutes off normal cycle time, and SmartDiagnosis, which lets you use your smart phone to trouble-shoot problems.

A2 performed similarly, offers comparable capacity, and also has 14 cycles. The Accela-Wash option trims normal cycle time by 15 minutes or so. As with **A1**, the washer is 2 inches wider than most others, and so is its dryer. **A3** has 11 wash cycles and is slightly faster than other recommended front-loaders, and its matching dryer is among the quietest tested. Both have a large capacity, about 17 to 24 pounds, but they aren't jumbo, which is 25 to 28 pounds. **B1**, a high-efficiency top-loader, has a jumbo capacity, is faster than the front-loaders, and is among the few top-loaders to deliver superb cleaning. It has 14 cycles and TurboWash, but as with most top-loaders, it wasn't so gentle on fabrics.

IMPRESSIVE PAIRS FOR LESS

B4 LG \$600 **CR Best Buy** and
C9 LG \$600

B12 LG \$700 and **LG DLE1101W** \$700

B19 LG \$800 and **LG DLE4870W** \$800

B20 Whirlpool \$700 and
C10 Whirlpool \$700

These high-efficiency top-loaders are faster than front-loaders. Most have eight cycles. Except for **B20**, these models are quiet enough to place near bedrooms. **B4** cleaned superbly, but its capacity isn't as large as most top models. Its matching dryer is less expensive than most we've tested. **B12** and **B19** were gentler on fabrics. **B20** has 13 cycles, and its normal wash time is up to 35 minutes faster, but capacity isn't as large as most top-loaders and it's relatively noisy.

Ratings Washers

Top models From 122 tested.



A2 Kenmore



C15 Kenmore

● Excellent
○ Very good
○ Good
● Fair
● Poor

☒ CR Best Buy
 ☒ Recommended

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results							Features			
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.		0 100 P F G V E	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Capacity	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Cycle time (min.)	Stackable	Steam option	Wi-Fi-enabled

A FRONT-LOADERS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	LG WM8500HVA	\$1,600	82	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	90	●	●	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Kenmore Elite 41073	1,200	82	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	95	●	●	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Maytag Maxima XL MHW8000AG	1,300	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	80	●	●	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	LG WM8000H[V]A	1,200	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	100	●	●	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung WF457ARG5[GR] WF455ARG5WR	1,550	80	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	100	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Samsung WF56H9100AG	1,520	80	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	85	●	●	
	7	Maytag Maxima XL MHW7000AW MHW6000AW	1,150	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	90	●	●	
	8	Whirlpool Duet WFL98HEBU	1,500	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	75	●	●	
	9	Whirlpool Duet FFW88HEAW	1,000	78	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	80	●	●	
	10	LG WM3070H[W]A	900	78	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	85	●	●	
	11	LG WM3470H[W]A	1,100	78	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	85	●	●	
	12	Kenmore Elite 4147[2]	1,100	78	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	85	●	●	
	13	Samsung WF435ATGJ[WR] WF433BTGJ[1]	1,300	77	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	105	●	●	
	14	Kenmore 4137[2]	1,050	77	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	85	●	●	
	15	Whirlpool Duet FFW86HEBC FFW80HEBW	1,100	77	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	90	●	●	
	16	Whirlpool Duet FFW70HEBW	800	77	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	80	●	●	
	17	Kenmore 41182	700	77	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	100	●	●	
	18	Maytag Maxima X MHW4200BW MHW3000BW	1,000	77	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	85	●	●	
	19	Whirlpool Duet FFW96HEA[W]	1,300	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	85	●	●	
	20	Whirlpool Duet FFW94HEX[W] FFW94HEAW	1,100	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	75	●	●	

B TOP-LOADERS All are high-efficiency models and do not have a center agitator.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	LG WT5680HVA	1,200	73	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	75			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Kenmore Elite 31412	950	72	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	75			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LG WT1701CV	1,100	72	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	75			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	LG WT1001CW	600	72	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	70			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung WA422PRHD[WR]	750	72	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	75			
	6	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB725BW MVWB700BW	800	70	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	90			
	7	GE GTWN7450DWW	800	70	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	60			
	8	LG WT5070C[W]	1,000	70	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	65			
	9	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB980BW MVWB880BW	1,000	69	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	85		●	
	10	Samsung WA50F9A8DSP	1,200	69	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	75			
	11	Kenmore 28102	800	69	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	75			
	12	LG WT1101CW	700	69	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	75			
	13	Samsung WA456DRHD[WR]	900	69	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	75			
	14	Samsung WA50F9A6DSW WA50F9A7DSW	1,000	69	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	75			
	15	Samsung WA400PJHD[WR]	700	68	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	75			
	16	Samsung WA56H9000AP	1,500	68	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	75		●	
	17	GE Adora GHWN8350DWS (Home Depot) GTWN8250DWS, GTWS8450DWS	1,000	68	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	60			
	18	Whirlpool Cabrio WTW8900BW WTW8500BW, WTW8540BW (Lowe's)	1,000	67	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	90		●	
	19	LG WT4870C[W]	800	67	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	75		●	●
	20	Whirlpool Cabrio WTW5800BW WTW5500BW	700	65	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	40			

¹ Wider than most other washers.

Ratings Dryers

Top models From 100 tested.



☒ Recommended



B20 Whirlpool C10 Whirlpool

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Features
		Similar and gas models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.			Drying performance	Capacity
					Convenience	Noise
					Stackable	Custom programs
					Steam option	Wi-Fi-enabled

C DRYERS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung DV56H9100EG Gas: DV56H9100GP [2]	\$1,520	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung DV56H9000EP Gas: DV56H9000GP [2]	1,500	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LG DLEX8500V Gas: DLGX8501V [2]	1,600	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Kenmore Elite 61623 Gas: 71623	1,050	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung DV50F9A8EVP Gas: DV50F9A8GVP	1,100	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	6	LG DLEX3250W Gas: DLGX3251W	900	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	7	LG DLEY1701V Gas: DLGY1702W	1,100	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	8	GE GFDR485EFMC Gas: GFDR485GFC [2]	1,400	78	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	9	LG DLE1001W Gas: DLG1002W	600	78	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	10	Whirlpool Cabrio WED5800BW WED5500BW Gas: WGD5800BW	700	77	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	11	Maytag Maxima XL MED8000AG Gas: MGD8000AG	1,300	77	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	12	Kenmore 81182 81282 Gas: 91182	700	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	13	LG DLEX3470[W] Gas: DLGX3471[W]	1,000	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	14	LG DLEX5680V Gas: DLGX5681W	1,200	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	15	Kenmore Elite 81073 Gas: 91073 [2]	1,200	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	16	Samsung DV456EWH[W] Gas: DV456GWH[W]	900	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	17	Whirlpool Duet WED96HEAW Gas: WGD96HEAW	1,300	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	18	Kenmore Elite 6152[2] Gas: 71522	1,000	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	19	Maytag Bravos X MEDX700AG Gas: MGD700AG	900	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	20	LG Smart ThinQ DLEX6001V Gas: DLGX6002V	1,500	75	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

[2] Wider than most other dryers.

Best and worst brands

We analyzed washers and dryers we've tested over the past three years to see which brands have performed best over time. A strong track record raises the odds of getting a good model. For inconsistent brands, stick with models that scored well in our Ratings.

FRONT-LOADERS

Safe bets Electrolux, Kenmore, Maytag, Samsung, and Whirlpool, though lower-priced Samsung front-loaders tend to score lower.

Relatively safe bets

Amana and LG

You can do better than

Frigidaire and GE. Our Product Reliability Surveys show that those brands have been among the more repair-prone, and Frigidaire front-loaders haven't performed well in our tests.

HIGH-EFFICIENCY TOP-LOADERS

Safe bets LG and Samsung

Relatively safe bets GE, Kenmore, Maytag, and Whirlpool, though they haven't scored as highly as LG and Samsung.

You can do better than

Fisher & Paykel and Haier

ELECTRIC DRYERS

Safe bets LG and Samsung

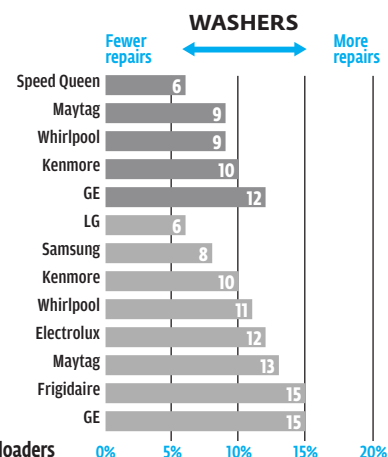
Relatively safe bets Electrolux, Frigidaire, GE, Kenmore, Maytag, and Whirlpool. Frigidaire, GE, and Kenmore dryers costing less than \$600 tend to score a bit lower.

You can do better than

Fisher & Paykel

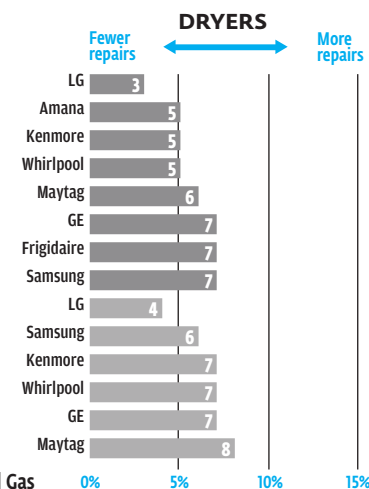
MOST AND LEAST RELIABLE 72,800 readers sound off

Among top-loaders, Speed Queen is more reliable than Kenmore and GE but similar to Maytag and Whirlpool. For front-loaders, LG is among the more reliable brands. GE and Frigidaire are among the more repair-prone, though their repair rates are similar to Maytag and Electrolux. We didn't have enough data to include Fisher & Paykel, LG, and Samsung top-loaders in our chart, but our analysis puts Fisher & Paykel among the more repair-prone and LG and Samsung among the more promising brands.



MOST AND LEAST RELIABLE 63,300 readers sound off

LG is among the more reliable brands. Among electric dryers, it was more reliable than GE, Frigidaire, Maytag, and Samsung. But LG's reliability is similar to Amana's, Kenmore's, and Whirlpool's. Among gas dryers, LG is more reliable than GE, Kenmore, Maytag, and Whirlpool, but LG's reliability is similar to Samsung's. We didn't have enough data to include Frigidaire gas dryers in our chart, but our analysis indicates that the brand's reliability remains problematic.



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on feedback from almost 136,100 readers who bought new washers and dryers between 2009 and 2013. Differences of fewer than 4 points for washers and 3 points for dryers aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to age. Models within a brand may vary, and design and manufacture changes may affect reliability.

Super suds

When it comes to detergent, cheaper can be better

EVEN IF YOU'RE not a fashion plate, you probably own a small fortune in clothing, not to mention linens, towels, and the like. But you don't have to get soaked keeping those washables looking new. Some of the best stain fighters in our latest detergent tests were among the least expensive. We also found several suds that were duds—in every price category—and so-called detergent-less laundry systems that barely made a dent. Here are the details:

Warehouse clubs win big. Tide hangs on to the top spot among detergents suitable for all machines and those formulated for conventional top-loaders. But Member's Mark Ultimate Clean, a Sam's Club exclusive, and Costco's Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean did very well overall for about half the cost, and both can be used in all machines.

Bargain Tide can't compete. Procter &

Gamble has added its own budget detergent to the Tide family—Tide Simply Clean & Fresh, described as “tough on odors and easy on your wallet.” At 11 cents per load it's cheap, but it couldn't vanquish blood, grass, and ring around the collar in our tough tests, making it an also-ran.

Pods and packs are still dangerous. More manufacturers are coming out with single-load detergents, those convenient packets that eliminate the need for measuring. None made our recommended list this year, though All Might Pacs Oxi, 17 cents per load, handled most stains. Tide Pods, 22 cents per load, also performed very well overall.

But be sure to keep those enticing packets out of the reach of tots. Since they went mainstream in 2012, poison-control centers have received more than 20,000 calls concerning incidents involving children 5 or younger.

GET IT WHILE IT LASTS

Costco is phasing out this powder detergent, but its Kirkland Signature liquid and packs are also tough on stains.



Fight wrinkles: The best irons, plus how to iron like a pro

What makes a great iron? Models that release more steam tend to do the best and fastest job, based on our tests of dozens. And features that make ironing go more smoothly include a light that indicates that the iron has reached the proper temperature; auto-shutoff,

a safety feature that powers the iron down when left stationary for a short time; a steam-surge button that releases a burst of steam for tackling stubborn wrinkles; and vertical steam, which lets you remove wrinkles from drapes and hanging garments.

Three top picks



The Panasonic NI-W950A emits plenty of steam, and it has a large reservoir so that you can do lots of ironing before it needs refilling. But this iron is big, heavy, and pricey at \$220.



The Singer Expert Finish EF, \$60, is lightweight but not in terms of performance. It's a CR Best Buy.



The Rowenta Effective Comfort DW2070, \$50, also aced our ironing and steaming tests, and is a CR Best Buy.

Get the best results from any iron

Heed hard-water advice.

Most irons work fine with tap water. But if your water is very hard, you might want to mix it with distilled water. Mineral deposits are more common with hard water, so you also might need to clean the soleplate and steam holes more frequently. Follow the owners' manual.

Start cool. Irons heat up faster than they cool down. So start with synthetics and other fabrics that require a cooler iron, then do wools at medium and finish on high with cottons and linens. Allow a minute or so between changes for the iron to heat up.

Prevent dribbles.

Leaking can occur when you iron at lower temperatures, so add water after you have pressed delicate fabrics. Remember to empty any leftover water once you're done ironing. That reduces the chance of drips the next time you iron, and the heat will evaporate the remaining moisture.

Clean the iron, including the soleplate.

Even if you don't have hard water, do that occasionally, especially if you use starch. Some have a self-clean setting.

SHOPPING TIPS

Match the detergent to the machine. That's easier with all of the detergents designed for high-efficiency (HE) or conventional washers. Dual-use detergents tend to perform better in HE machines, which don't use as much water to dilute the detergent. Never use standard detergent in an HE machine; it will cause excessive suds.

Liquid or powder. Liquids dissolve easily, so they're less likely to leave a residue. Plus they make it easy to pretreat stains.

Powders are more compatible with bleaching agents, which can improve their cleaning power, but too much can cause caking on clothes. Single-load packets are convenient and prevent overdosing, but you can't cut one in half for small loads.

Check the cap. Look at the measuring marks, especially if you use a liquid. Some are very hard to read, which could cause you to use too much detergent. That not only wastes money but can also leave residue on clothes.



The dirt on detergent-less laundry systems

"Does detergent-free laundry sound too good to be true?" That's the tag line for the pureWash Eco Friendly Laundry System. Based on our tests of it and the similarly marketed Wash It laundry system, the answer is, "Yes, it is too good to be true."

The \$300 pureWash and \$400 Wash It systems mount to the wall above any top-load or front-load washing machine. Instead of using detergent, the systems supposedly get clothes clean by injecting solubilized ozone into cold wash water. "Deep

cleaning your laundry like never before," claims the Wash It website.

We connected the devices to our washers and followed our standard detergent test procedure, which uses fabric swatches soiled with mud, blood, grass, chocolate, and the like. Once the wash cycles were done, we used a colorimeter to assess how well each device cleaned our swatches. Both were barely better than plain water—and much worse than most detergents.

As for the money-saving claims the manufacturers make, they don't hold water

by our calculations. For example, the \$300 pureWash is supposed to last 10 years. Assuming typical use, you'd spend roughly that much on one of our top-rated bargain detergents—and get cleaner clothes in the process.

Bottom line. We love the idea of a detergent-less laundry system, which would save money and time for consumers and have less of an impact on the environment. But the systems don't live up to the promise.

The laundry doctor is in

Your most stubborn problems solved

PROBLEM

Soap residue

SOLUTION Measure the recommended amount of a top-rated HE detergent for a medium or regular load. It won't be as sudsy as regular detergent and improves the performance of HE top-loaders and front-loaders. And be sure to use the detergent dispenser because it mixes water with dissolved detergent at the start of the cycle, improving wash and rinse performance. If you're a fan of detergent pods, put the pod at the bottom of the wash-tub, then add laundry. Residue streaks can also occur when fabric softener is added during the wash cycle. If all else fails, select the extra rinse option. When adding bleach, follow the instructions.

PROBLEM

Fabrics that pill

SOLUTION Pilling can happen when items with short, weak, fuzzy fibers rub against ones

with long, strong fibers. To minimize the risk, don't wash short-fiber towels, fleece, corduroy, sweat-shirts, and cheap T-shirts with long-fiber items, such as sheets and most synthetics.

PROBLEM

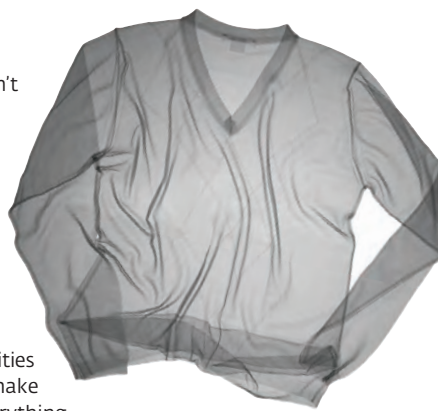
Colors that bleed

SOLUTION Larger capacities and longer wash times make it tempting to throw everything in the same load. But don't. Wash darks apart from lights, and items that can be washed in hot water, usually cottons and whites, separate from those for cooler temperatures, such as synthetics. Lightly soiled items should be in one load, heavily soiled in another.

PROBLEM

Mold or mildew in the washer

SOLUTION Moisture and debris can get trapped in a front-loader's door seal, causing mold and odor. After doing



your laundry, wipe the door gasket and glass dry, and clean dispensers monthly. If you don't have young children, keep the washer door ajar when the washer isn't in use to let air circulate. Some models have a cycle that washes the inside of the machine. If yours doesn't, run an empty load with a hot-water wash or with some chlorine bleach.

Why being green still isn't easy

There's no federal standard for such terms as "natural" and "earth-friendly," but that doesn't stop marketers from using them. Dubious claims aside, no green detergents made our winners' list, in part because they often do without optical brighteners and grime-fighting polymer compounds.

Many from our latest tests were downright dismal, including Walmart's Great Value Naturals, which got an overall score of just 25. Ecos 2X Ultra HE, 14 cents per load, and Trader Joe's Liquid Laundry HE, 8 cents per load, also struggled against all stains. One worth considering: Seventh Generation Natural Laundry Detergent Powder, 26 cents per load, which has performed well in past tests.



A1 Tide

A3 Member's Mark

Our detergent picks

Top detergents did best against most stains in cold water. Among these top picks, we focus below on the ones with special strengths, value, or both.

✓ **CR Best Buy** These blend superior cleaning and value. All are recommended.

✓ **Recommended** These top-scoring detergents perform well. Products below stand out for the reasons noted.

FOR HIGH-EFFICIENCY WASHERS

A1 Tide 25 cents per load

A3 Member's Mark 12 cents per load

A4 Kirkland Signature 9 cents per load **CR Best Buy**

A7 All 17 cents per load

Choose **A1** for top all-around cleaning. Sam's Club shoppers should consider **A3** for great value and performance. Opt for **A4** if you prefer powder and shop at Costco. **A7** is our highest-rated packet.

FOR CONVENTIONAL WASHERS

B1 Tide 28 cents per load

A7 All 17 cents per load

B1 is tops in this category.

Also consider **A7** if you want the convenience of a packet.

The 75° F test

Some familiar brands that we've tested in the past year may now have different scores. That's because we used to test laundry detergents in warm water (90° F) and cool water (75° F). But newer washers use cooler water during warm-wash cycles, and more consumers are switching to cold-water washing to save energy. So to evaluate detergents as they're likely to be used, we eliminated the warm-water test.

Ratings Laundry detergents

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

Rec.	Rank	Brand & product	Type	Price	Overall score	Test results
					0 100 P F G VG E	Cleaning Grass Blood Collar ring

A HIGH-EFFICIENCY/DUAL-USE Most work with HE or standard washers.

✓	1	Tide Ultra Stain Release ①	liquid	25¢	81	● ● ● ●
✓	2	Tide HE Plus Bleach Alternative ①	powder	23	81	● ● ● ●
✓	3	Member's Mark Ultimate Clean (Sam's Club)	liquid	12	73	● ● ● ●
✓	4	Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean (Costco) ②	powder	9	72	● ● ● ●
✓	5	Wisk Deep Clean	liquid	14	71	● ● ● ●
	6	Kirkland Signature Free & Clear	liquid	11	70	● ● ● ●
	7	All Mighty Pacs Oxi	Pods/packs	17	69	● ● ● ●
	8	Tide Pods	Pods/packs	22	68	● ● ● ●
	9	Gain Flings	Pods/packs	24	66	● ● ● ●
	10	OxiClean Laundry Detergent	liquid	14	66	● ● ● ●
	11	Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean Pacs (Costco)	Pods/packs	15	65	● ● ● ●
	12	All Mighty Pacs	Pods/packs	18	62	● ● ● ●
	13	Up & Up HE Free & Clear (Target)	liquid	12	61	● ● ● ●
	14	Great Value Original Clean (Walmart)	liquid	13	61	● ● ● ●
	15	White Cloud Laundry Detergent (Walmart)	liquid	7	60	○ ● ● ●
	16	All Free Clear Oxi Active	liquid	14	60	○ ● ● ●
	17	All Oxi Active HE	liquid	14	58	○ ● ● ●
	18	Legacy of Clean SA8 Triple Liquid HE	liquid	30	58	○ ● ● ●
	19	Gain HE2	liquid	14	58	○ ● ● ●
	20	All Stainlifter (with in-wash pretreaters)	liquid	10	57	○ ● ● ●
	21	Nice Power Pacs (Walgreens)	Pods/packs	34	56	○ ● ● ●
	22	dropps Oxi Scent+ Stain Fighting Detergent	Pods/packs	20	56	○ ● ● ●
	23	Arm & Hammer Crystal Burst Plus OxiClean	Pods/packs	15	55	○ ● ● ●
	24	All Small & Mighty	liquid	12	54	○ ● ● ●
	25	Purex Plus Oxi UltraPacs	Pods/packs	15	52	○ ● ● ●
	26	Arm & Hammer Toss 'N Done Power Pacs	Pods/packs	13	52	○ ● ● ●
	27	Tide Simply Clean & Fresh	liquid	11	51	○ ● ● ●
	28	Nice 2X Ultra (Walgreens)	liquid	16	51	○ ● ● ●
	29	Member's Mark Wind Fresh (Sam's Club)	powder	8	51	○ ● ● ●
	30	Purex Dirt Lift Action UltraPacs	Pods/packs	15	50	○ ● ● ●
	31	Purex Plus Oxi	liquid	21	49	○ ● ● ●
	32	Method Ultra Concentrated	liquid	24	48	○ ● ● ●
	33	Purex No Sort	liquid	10	47	○ ● ● ●
	34	Seventh Generation Natural 4X Concentrated	liquid	26	47	○ ● ● ●
	35	Green Works Laundry Detergent	liquid	12	45	○ ● ● ●
	36	Purex Dirt Lift Action	liquid	7	42	○ ● ● ●
	37	Ecover Zero 2.5X Concentrate HE	liquid	18	41	○ ● ● ●
	38	Home Solv 2x Concentrated	liquid	20	39	○ ● ● ●
	39	Seventh Generation Natural Laundry Packs Advanced Triple Enzyme	Pods/packs	30	38	○ ● ● ●
	40	Oxydol 2X Concentrated HE	liquid	12	36	○ ● ● ●
	41	Sun Triple Clean	liquid	5	35	○ ● ● ●
	42	Xtra ScentSations	liquid	12	32	○ ● ● ●
	43	Trader Joe's Liquid Laundry HE	liquid	8	31	○ ● ● ●
	44	Ecos 2X Ultra HE	liquid	14	29	○ ● ● ●
	45	Martha Stewart Clean 2X	liquid	18	26	○ ● ● ●
	46	Great Value Naturals (Walmart)	liquid	14	25	○ ● ● ●

B CONVENTIONAL ONLY For standard top-loading washers.

✓	1	Tide Ultra Free & Gentle	powder	28	61	● ● ● ●
	2	Gain Icy Fresh Fizz Oxi Boost 2-in-1 Freshlock	liquid	19	49	○ ● ● ●
	3	Era Active Stainfighter	liquid	9	47	○ ● ● ●
	4	Just the Basics 2X Concentrated (CVS)	liquid	8	31	○ ● ● ●

① Designated HE only. ② Not available in the Northeast.

Lab Tests

Great, cheap HD camcorders

Many people shoot video on their smart phones and even on tablets. But those devices can't compete with a regular camcorder's quality and features, including much better zoom and jitter-free movies.

We combed our Ratings to find easy-to-carry models that offer those advantages at a modest price. We came up with three CR Best Buys that cost \$230 to \$400. The two Sony models and the Panasonic all capture very good high-definition video in regular and low light. They're compact and lightweight—about a half-pound—and offer decent battery life. You won't get premium features such as an electronic viewfinder, but their LCD displays work well.

One model that fell just short of being recommended is worth considering as an alternative to an action cam. The rugged, waterproof JVC has better video quality than most action cams plus a few features you won't get on those models.

Panasonic
HC-V550



Sony HDR-CX240

CR Best Buys

Sony HDR-CX240

Price \$230

One of the lowest-priced models in our Ratings, it has a 27x optical zoom and a very good-quality 2.7-inch LCD monitor. Battery life is 130 minutes.

Sony HDR-CX330

Price \$330

This model offers 30x optical zoom (the 60x in the photo refers to digital zoom) and 180 minutes of battery life. It uses Wi-Fi to transfer video and photos, unusual at this price. It has a very good 2.7-inch LCD.

Panasonic HC-V550

Price \$400

With a high-quality 50x optical zoom, this model is great for shooting action from far away. You can compose your footage on its excellent-quality 3-inch touch-screen LCD. It also has built-in Wi-Fi for easy sharing. Plus it has some unique features, such as an advanced level shot function (which automatically corrects for a tilting horizon line) and a five-axis image-stabilization system for steady footage.



Sony
HDR-CX330

Worth a look

JVC GZ-R70

Price \$500

This waterproof model is great for shooting underwater or for use on rugged, wet terrain. In our tests, it remained waterproof to a depth of 16 feet. It has a very good image stabilizer for less-jittery video (important when you're moving fast) and a 40x optical zoom lens, so

you can keep your distance from scary critters or capture distant marvels. It offers a generous 180 minutes of battery life and a very good 3-inch touch-screen LCD. At more than a half-pound, it's heavier than most action cams but takes better video than many of those models.



Hamilton Beach combo unit is doubly disappointing

Like to follow your morning coffee with a fruit smoothie? The **Hamilton Beach Java Blend Brewer/Blender 40918**, \$70, which combines a “to go” style drip coffeemaker with a two-speed blender, might sound like a nice convenience. But like other multi-functional appliances we’ve tested, it didn’t live up to the promise.

As a blender, multiple samples of the Hamilton Beach failed our durability test, which involves repeated crushing of our large, tray-made ice cubes. One sample broke during our regular icy drink test. We also tested the blender’s performance using smaller crescent-shaped ice cubes, which the manufacturer’s recipes recommend. It fared better in those tests, producing a very good piña colada, for example.

Turning to our coffeemaker tests, the Hamilton Beach earned an overall score of 40. It fell short for brewing temperature and duration, necessary for a flavorful cup of joe. It also was just so-so for convenience, though to be fair no to-go coffeemaker scored better in that regard. But several models did deliver superior brewing, including the **KitchenAid Architect**

KCM0402ACS, \$100, which was rated Excellent on that measure.

Bottom line. You’re better off investing in a full-sized blender and a coffeemaker, especially if your kitchen has room. For an extra \$20 in total cost, you could get two products we recommend: the **Mr. Coffee BVMC-EHX33CP coffeemaker**, \$30, and the top-rated **Ninja Master Prep Professional QB1004 blender**, \$60.



Hamilton Beach Java Blend Brewer/Blender 40918

Good alternatives



Mr. Coffee BVMC-EHX33CP coffeemaker



Ninja Master Prep Professional QB1004 blender



How to be efficient with printers

You can cut down on your printing costs by following a few simple strategies that we’ve uncovered while testing hundreds of printers in our labs:

Aim for the stars. Look for the Energy Star label, which indicates that printers consume very little power when not printing. Go to energystar.gov for details.

Leave it on. Certain printers use more ink when getting ready to print after you switch them on rather than keeping them in stand-by mode.

Print fewer pages. You can get more use from your real estate by decreasing a page’s margins or avoiding double line spacing. Some

printers also have a built-in duplex-er to print on both sides of a page.

Don’t print blanks. Use print preview to spot pages with little or no information.

Use frugal fonts. Avoid using the Arial font, which uses more ink than Times Roman. Print text in black or grayscale to save on color ink.

Paper sense. Use plain paper for works in progress. Save the good stuff, such as photo paper, for the final results.

Portable A/Cs are not so cool

Think of a portable A/C as the air conditioner of last resort if you can't mount a window or wall model: They're better than a fan, but not much. Even the largest we tested struggled to cool a 250-square-foot space down to the 78° F the government considers minimal for comfort, despite claims of up to 550 square feet right on the box. Here's what we found in our tests of eight units:

Design challenges. The best window A/Cs chill an area quickly and efficiently by cooling and recirculating inside air and releasing mainly heat to the outdoors. By contrast, portable units must continuously draw in unconditioned air from surrounding areas as they exhaust hot air through a long, ungainly hose that vents through a window. The result is a vacuum effect that keeps room temperatures relatively torrid by constantly pulling warmer air into the room. Indeed, about 20 to 40 percent of portable A/Cs are returned by unhappy customers.

Small models are especially tepid.

We measured how long it took to lower the temperature in two rooms—150 square feet for smaller units and 250 square feet for larger ones—from 90° F to 75° F. Even the large models we tested couldn't get our test room below 80° F after 100 minutes. And none of the small models could cool a room to 80° F in that time.

Two are iffy in brownout conditions.

We also test whether air conditioners will restart after stepping down the voltage to simulate a brownout. The **A2 Haier** never restarted on its own, and the **B3 Sunpentown** did so only after we raised the voltage again.

Shopping tips

You might consider the lower-priced **B2 Honeywell**, \$400, if you can't install a window A/C. And as with others, expect to sit directly in front of it to feel the most cooling.

Give little weight to numbers. The Department of Energy is developing energy standards for portable A/Cs; we'd like to see portable models tested similarly to window models to measure cooling capacity more accurately. In the meantime, don't assume that a portable A/C rated at 5,000 or 15,000 Btu/hr. will cool like similarly rated window models.

Install it right. Be sure exhaust-hose connections at the unit and window are tight.

Give it some help. Consider using a ceiling fan to help you feel cooler in other parts of the room. And close curtains and shades to keep out the sun's radiant heat.



A1 Frigidaire



A2 Haier



B1 Honeywell

Ratings

All tested models In performance order, within types.

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results					Specs	
				Comfort	Brownout	Indoor noise high	Indoor noise low	Ease of use	EER	Max window width (in.)

A 5,000 TO 8,500 BTU/HR.

1	Frigidaire FRA053PU1	\$320	28	●	●	○	○	○	NA	48
2	Haier HPY08XCM	250	27	●	●	○	○	○	NA	55

B 9,000 TO 15,500 BTU/HR.

1	Honeywell MM14CCS	550	49	●	●	○	○	○	NA	47
2	Honeywell MN10CESWW	400	48	●	●	○	○	○	NA	47
3	Sunpentown WA-1240H	430	47	●	○	○	○	○	NA	48
4	Frigidaire FRA123PT1	500	44	●	●	○	○	○	NA	46
5	Haier HPF12XHM	480	43	●	●	○	○	○	NA	46
6	Haier HPD10XCM	300	26	●	●	○	○	○	NA	46

Best window A/Cs from our tests

Here are the top scorers in each size. Choose one that's right for your space. Models too small might not cool enough, and those too large can cycle on and off frequently, making you feel cold and clammy.

Small (100 to 300 square feet)
GE AEM05LS, \$210 **CR Best Buy**

Medium (250 to 400 square feet)
LG LW8014ER, \$240

Large (350 to 650 square feet)
LG LW1214ER, \$350



GE AEM05LS



LG LW8014ER



LG LW1214ER

The Hot List

A monthly guide to the top products our testers recommend



84

Makita BHP454

Cordless drills/drivers

Model	Score
FOR TOUGH JOBS	
Makita BHP454, \$280	84
Milwaukee 2603-22, \$280	83
DeWalt DCD 940KX, \$280	81
FOR GENERAL USE	
Hitachi DS18DSAL, \$170	78
Makita LXFD01CW, \$200	77

Model	Score
FOR GENERAL USE continued	
Ridgid R86008K, \$180	77
DeWalt DCD780C2, \$220	75
Panasonic EY6432GQKW, \$200	75
DeWalt DCD760KL, \$220	74
Ridgid R9600, \$180	72
Craftsman 17310, \$100	72



90

Husqvarna 356BT

Leaf blowers

Model	Score
GAS BACKPACK	
Husqvarna 356BT, \$480	90
Stihl BR 350, \$350	89
Echo PB-500H, \$330	87
Husqvarna 150BT, \$300	86
Husqvarna 350BT, \$300	86
Ryobi RY08420, \$200	85
GAS HANDHELD	
Echo PB-255LN, \$200	80
Husqvarna 125B, \$150	80
Husqvarna 125BVx, \$190	80
Stihl BG 56 C-E, \$170	79
Stihl BG 55, \$150	79
Echo PB-250LN, \$170	79
ELECTRIC HANDHELD	
Toro Ultra Blower Vac 51609, \$75	80
Toro Super Blower Vac 51602, \$60	78
Toro Rake and Vac 51574, \$55	77
Stihl BGE 61, \$110	75



Sharp R-323TKC

Microwave ovens

Model	Score
LARGE COUNTERTOP	
GE Profile PEB2060DM[BB], \$270	75
Panasonic Inverter NN-H965BF, \$180	75
Kenmore Elite 74229, \$180	75
MIDSIZED COUNTERTOP	
Sharp R-323TKC, \$140	79
Panasonic Genius Prestige NN-SD681S, \$180	72
Kenmore 72123, \$150	72
OVER-THE-RANGE	
GE Profile PVM9215SFSS, \$550	80
GE JVM3160RFSS, \$250	75
GE JVM7195SFSS, \$400	75



89

LG LDE3037SB

Ranges

Model	Score
-------	-------

30-INCH GAS, SINGLE OVEN

LG LSRG309ST, \$2,000	74
GE PGS920SEFSS, \$2,800	73
LG LRG3095ST, \$1,500	72
Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3032MW, \$775	71
Samsung NX58F5500SS, \$1,000	71
LG LRG3091SW, \$1,000	71
Kenmore 74132, \$700	70

30-INCH GAS, DOUBLE OVEN

LG LDG3037ST, \$1,900	75
GE PGB950SEFSS, \$2,500	70

30-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN

LG LRE3083W, \$1,000	86
LG LRE3023S, \$1,000	86
GE Café CS980SNSS, \$2,800	86
LG LRE3025S, \$1,250	86
Electrolux EI30EF35JS, \$1,600	85
Samsung NE58F9500WS, \$1,800	84
GE PS920SEFSS, \$2,500	83

30-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOP, DOUBLE OVEN

LG LDE3037SB, \$1,300	89
Maytag MET8885XS, \$1,700	83
Frigidaire FGFE302TNF, \$1,400	82
Frigidaire FGFE308TNF, \$1,800	81
LG LDE3015ST, \$1,300	81



Big-screen TVs

Model	Score
-------	-------

60 INCHES AND BIGGER

LG 60LA8600, \$2,400	76
Samsung PN60F8500, \$2,400	75
Sony Bravia XBR-65X900A, \$3,800	74
Samsung PN64F5500, \$1,800	74
Samsung UN60F7500, \$2,200	72

Model	Score
-------	-------

60 INCHES AND BIGGER continued

Sharp Aquos LC-60LE857U, \$2,000	72
Panasonic Viera TC-L65WT600, \$3,500	71
Samsung PN64H5000, \$1,400	70
Samsung UN65F8000, \$3,000	70

Stand mixers

Model	Score
-------	-------

Breville BEM800XL, \$300	81
KitchenAid Professional 6500 Design Series, \$550	79
KitchenAid Classic (250-watt) K45SS(WH), \$200	79
Hamilton Beach Eclectrics 6322[1], \$180	78
KitchenAid Artisan KSM150PS(WW), \$300	78

81

Breville
BEM800XL



ConsumerReports®

Choose the right used car



Essential Guide Tells You:

- Find the best financing
- Cars that stretch your fuel economy
- How to avoid a lemon
- Get top dollar when selling or trading in
- Reviews of 276 models

PLUS: Exclusive Reliability Ratings

Available at bookstores or at
ConsumerReports.org/books

Cars



Plug-in reality check

Are electric-car shoppers getting the right info from dealers?

THERE ARE SEVERAL good reasons to consider buying an electric vehicle (EV), if you can live with the limited driving range. They include a dramatically lower cost per mile than a similar-sized gasoline car, quiet operation, fewer maintenance costs (EVs don't need oil changes), and the ability to drive gas-free (no more of your dollars paying for foreign oil).

But last year we got the word that some shoppers were being discouraged from buying an EV, even at dealerships that had them on the lot. Instead, salespeople were trying to steer them to conventional gasoline cars. What was going on?

To find out, we sent 20 secret shoppers to 85 dealerships in four states: California,

Maryland, New York, and Oregon. The study took place between December 2013 and March 2014. We wanted to know how well the sales reps knew the details about these advanced models and whether they were giving customers accurate information.

To gauge the salespeople's knowledge about plug-in EVs, our shoppers asked a number of specific questions about the vehicle and other aspects of EV ownership. Those included how long it took to charge the car, its driving range, the cost of driving it, available tax breaks and other incentives, and the warranty for the battery and electric powertrain components. They also asked the reps whether they recommended buying or leasing.

Facing the facts

Overall, we found a correlation between the sales rep's EV knowledge and whether he or she encouraged customers to buy one.

Though our shoppers encountered several very knowledgeable salespeople, few provided accurate and specific answers about battery warranties. And many seemed not to have a good understanding of the cars' charging needs and costs, or electric-car tax breaks and incentives.

We found a wide range of EV familiarity among salespeople at each of the brands' dealerships we visited. Still, when it came to answering basic questions, salespeople at the Chevrolet, Ford, and Nissan dealerships were more often better informed than those at the Honda and Toyota dealers (although our sample of Honda dealers is much smaller than for the others because only four of the 14 we contacted had EVs on the lot).

When asked about the battery in a Prius Plug-in, for example, one Toyota salesman in a California dealership said it required replacement "every couple of years." Though the Plug-in model has been on sale for only a couple of years, that is unlikely given the battery's eight- to 10-year warranty.

Similarly, a sales manager at a New York City Ford dealership first denied there was a Focus EV, then said it couldn't be leased. Both statements are incorrect. When asked about a Prius Plug-in, a Toyota salesman in Bayside, N.Y., would not even show the car, despite having one in stock.

Not surprisingly, our shoppers also found that salespeople in dealerships with no electric cars on the lot were less knowledgeable about EVs. Most of the dealers we visited had only one or two cars; only 20 had more than 10. In general, California dealers tended to have more cars on the lot, and Maryland and New York dealers had fewer.

Many sales reps also didn't seem to recognize that for people who want an electric car, leasing can be more attractive than buying. They don't have to worry about resale value or long-term battery life, and they don't have to wait until tax time to benefit from the generous tax incentive because it's built into the deal. *Continued on next page*

Electric or gas?

Our shoppers reported that sales reps at 35 of the 85 dealerships they visited recommended buying a gas-powered car instead of a plug-in. Thirteen dealers openly discouraged them from getting an EV in general, although most had very little inventory.

In a few cases, it seems that our shoppers were getting reasonable advice. A Nissan

salesman, for example, suggested a Nissan SUV instead of the Leaf EV when our shopper said she had a commute that would stretch the Leaf's driving range. Most of the Toyota dealerships we visited recommended against buying a Prius Plug-in and getting a standard Prius hybrid instead. We gave similar advice when we tested the Plug-in because it costs significantly more than the standard

Prius but doesn't provide much of a fuel-economy advantage.

If you're shopping for a plug-in car—or any car—do your homework and don't rely on salespeople for accurate information. For free general information about EVs, go to ConsumerReports.org/altfuels. ConsumerReports.org subscribers can also access our latest EV Ratings and reviews.

Six burning questions about electric cars

1 What are they?

There are two types of plug-in vehicles. Dedicated battery-electric cars run only on electricity. A plug-in hybrid runs solely or mainly on electricity until the battery is depleted, then it's powered by a conventional gas/electric hybrid system.

2 Where can I buy one?

Seventeen models are available from nine automakers. But so far EV sales are very regional; California and the Atlanta, New York City, and Portland, Ore., regions are the largest markets.

3 How much will it cost?

EV prices vary widely. But for a good mainstream model, such as the Chevrolet Volt, Ford Focus Electric, or Nissan Leaf, you can expect to pay about \$35,000 to \$44,000. For most, a federal tax incentive of \$7,500 is available, although if you buy, you have to wait for your tax refund to get it.

Some states also kick in their own incentives. California and Georgia provide an immediate rebate of \$2,500 to \$5,000, which can make an EV less expensive than an equivalent gas vehicle.

Beyond the purchase price, an EV can be much less expensive to drive than a conventional car. Charging at the national average of 11 cents per kilowatt-hour equates to about 3 cents per mile. As the chart at right shows, that's much less than even a Toyota Prius hybrid. Because EVs don't need oil changes, you can also save on maintenance costs.

4 How do I charge it?

Though all EVs can be charged from a household 120-volt outlet, it can take about 16 hours to fully charge a dedicated battery-electric car. You'll probably want to use a heavy-duty 240-volt charger, which slashes charging times to a more practical 4 to 6 hours. You can buy one at a large home center for about \$500 to \$1,200, plus installation. Be aware that you need 200-amp service to your house, and at least 15 amps—but preferably 30 to 40 amps—on a dedicated circuit near where you park. Depending on your current electrical system, installing that can cost hundreds of dollars more.

Public charging stations are appearing in more areas, but they still remain relatively few and far between in most regions.

5 How far can I drive?

We were able to drive the Nissan Leaf and Ford Focus Electric an average of 75 and 80 miles, respectively, on a full charge. But driving in wintry conditions with the heater and wipers on, for example, can easily cut 15 to 20 miles off of that range.

With the Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid, we averaged 35 miles on electric power before the gas engine kicked in. For many people, that's enough to commute gas-free. In the Toyota Prius Plug-in, we averaged only 12 miles before it reverted to regular hybrid operation.

6 What's the environmental impact?

Electric vehicles don't emit exhaust while running on electricity, but pollutants are generated by the power plants. Though

there is a potential of increasing the local pollutant levels near some plants, the total amount of pollutants related to EVs is generally less than that created by an equivalent number of gasoline vehicles.

According to a study by the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Electric Power Research Institute, if, by 2050, 20 percent of American cars were plug-ins with an electric range of 20 miles, carbon-dioxide emissions (associated with global warming) could be reduced by about 5 percent (although localized pollution near coal-powered plants would go up by a similar amount). Using 2008 figures from the Federal Highway Administration, that could result in a savings of 550 million gallons of gasoline per year.

Electric vs. gas: Costs per mile

This chart shows that the operating costs for the Nissan Leaf and Tesla Model S electric cars and the Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid, when running on electric power, are much less than for the Toyota Prius hybrid or a fuel-efficient conventional car such as the Toyota Corolla.

Vehicle	Price as tested	CR overall fuel economy	Cost per mile (cents)	Cost for trips		
				30 miles	50 miles	150 miles
Nissan Leaf	\$35,430	106 MPGe*	3.5	\$1.04	\$1.74	—
Chevrolet Volt: electric/gas	43,700	99 MPGe*/32 mpg	3.8/12.5	1.13	3.19	\$15.69
Tesla Model S	89,650	84 MPGe*	4.4	1.33	2.22	6.65
Toyota Prius (hybrid)	26,750	44 mpg	8.6	2.59	4.32	12.95
Toyota Corolla (gas)	18,404	32 mpg	11.9	3.56	5.94	17.81

*Miles-per-gallon equivalent on electric power. Cost is based on 11 cents/kWh for electricity, \$3.80 per gallon for regular gas, and \$4 for premium gas.





Clash of the sports car icons

The Porsche 911 edges the redesigned Chevrolet Corvette

In the world of high-performance cars, there are few models that exemplify the spirit of the genre like the Chevrolet Corvette and Porsche 911. In this fickle, ever-evolving category, the 911 has survived, even thrived, to celebrate its 50th anniversary this year. The venerable Corvette, despite its 61 years, still exudes the in-your-face attitude of youth.

Though both cars have evolved from very different roots, each has been recently redesigned and notably improved. They now go head-to-head in performance and charisma.

Long known for its panache and sheer brute force, the Corvette has been reborn for 2014 as a lighter, tighter, high-tech sports car. Previous Vettes delivered quick acceleration, but handling wasn't up to that of the 911 and other European thoroughbreds. The new Corvette has narrowed the gap, with quick reflexes and flat cornering. Moreover, gone is the cheap interior of past Vettes, replaced with higher-quality materials and a more refined feel.

The rear-engined 911, on the other hand, has always been known for its agility and precise, tactile feel. Benefiting from a 2013 redesign, the current model delivers a near-ideal balance of performance and livability. With its immediate throttle and steering responses, the 911 is as at home on a twisty, two-lane road as on a demanding race track.

Which car is best? In our testing, both generated excellent and near-identical

acceleration and braking results, in each case besting all other cars in our current ratings. The 911 still holds the edge in handling, however, as reflected in its higher maximum speed—59.5 mph vs. 57.5—in our accident-avoidance maneuver course. The Vette still feels more muscular than nimble.

The Porsche also has the edge in everyday livability, with better fuel economy, easier access, a nicer shifter, a slightly more comfortable ride, and lower noise levels. That said, neither car will be mistaken for a Lexus, in terms of plushness and quietness. The 911 is also available with all-wheel drive.

Where the Corvette succeeds hands down is in price. Our high-end Z51 3LT version cost \$73,260, a relative bargain compared with the \$110,630 for our lightly optioned 911. So which is better could come down to whether you're more interested in ultimate performance, measured in fine degrees, or in getting the most bang for the buck. That said, the new, less expensive BMW M235i (page 54) is a viable competitor to either of these icons.

Despite their stellar test scores, we can't recommend either car. The redesigned Corvette is too new for us to have reliability data, and the 911's reliability has been below average.

Ratings Luxury sports cars

In performance order.

Recommended

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
○ Fair
● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
					0 100 P F G V G E		
	1	BMW M235i	\$ 50,400	●	98	new	25
	2	Porsche 911 Carrera S	110,630	●	95	○	23
	3	Chevrolet Corvette Stingray LT3	73,260	●	92	new	20
✓	4	Porsche Boxster 2.7	59,600		83	○	23

Why some models are not recommended. The BMW M235i and Chevrolet Corvette are too new for us to have reliability data. The reliability of the Porsche 911 has been below average.



Porsche 911

THOUGH THE 911 HAS ALWAYS been known for its potent acceleration and razor-sharp handling, our redesigned Carrera S is also quite driver-friendly and easy to live with on a daily basis. Its 400-hp, 3.8-liter six-cylinder engine, mated to a precise seven-speed manual transmission, delivers lightning-quick acceleration. It sprinted from 0 to 60 mph in a brisk, grin-inducing 4.1 seconds, making it the quickest car we've tested in recent years.

Yet the power delivery is smooth, gradual, and effortless, with no sudden, head-snapping burst when you punch the throttle. Every prod of the gas pedal brings an immediate, yet measured, forward thrust. The gear ratios are very well matched to the engine's power. Given the eye-opening performance, fuel economy is commendable at 23 mpg overall on premium fuel. If you spend much time in traffic, consider Porsche's PDK automatic transmission, which is one of the smoothest and most responsive dual-clutch designs we've driven.

The 911's handling is superlative. It corners enthusiastically, with immediate turn-in response. It gobbles up twisty, bumpy roads at speed while remaining tied down and compliant. The new electric steering is well-weighted and provides decent feedback,



UNDERHOOD STORAGE With the engine in the rear, there is a decent-sized trunk in front.

although it feels somewhat artificial compared with the previous-generation model.

On the track, the 911 was super-grippy, yet docile and easy to control even at its high cornering limits. It aced our avoidance maneuver. We found the best way to extract performance on the track was by using the Sport Plus mode, which sharpens throttle response and loosens the reins of the stability control. It also adds timely rev matching on downshifts, which works very well.

Inside, you'll find excellent fit and finish. The upright seating position provides good visibility and makes the cabin a relatively comfortable place. Our car's partial-leather power seats were firm and super-supportive, as long as your torso isn't too broad.

The controls consist of a sea of buttons, which can be daunting at first, but they're manageable, and the touch screen is close by. Phone pairing is easy. But there are no steering-wheel controls on our 911.

Some inherent drawbacks can't be whitewashed, though. As sports cars go, the 911's ride is tolerable but certainly not plush. The rear-mounted flat-six engine sounds exhilarating, but its close proximity and constant thrum behind your head are omnipresent. Getting in and out of the snug seats won't be easy for everyone. The rear seat is handy in a pinch, but it's tiny. And then there's the price: Our lightly optioned Carrera S rang in at a sobering \$110,630.

Still, as a sports car, the 911 is hard to top.

Best version to get. We'd be content with the Carrera S, with the 14-way power seats, a sunroof, and heated seats and steering wheel. But dealers tend to stock cars with a long list of options. The \$1,850 Sport Chrono Package adds a nice analog dashboard stopwatch and different programming for the engine and stability-control system.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Acceleration, handling, braking, engine sound, visibility, handy small rear seat, fit and finish
LOWS	Ride, noise, access, price, controls, no backup camera available, reliability
TRIM LINE	Carrera S
DRIVETRAIN	400-hp, 3.8-liter six-cylinder engine; seven-speed manual transmission; rear-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	18-way power seats, sunroof, Sport Chrono package, Power Steering Plus, heated seats and steering wheel
TESTED PRICE	\$110,630

More test findings

BRAKING	Excellent performance.
HEADLIGHTS	Low- and high-beam bi-xenon lamps provide high light intensity but only limited distance.
ACCESS	Impaired by a low roof, high sill, low steering wheel, and large seat bolsters.
VISIBILITY	Good for a sports car. But no backup camera is available.
CABIN STORAGE	Limited.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	There are no rear head restraints, and the seatback is too low for protection.
CHILD SEATS	Limited rear-seat space and the seat-belt design make installations unlikely.



LIFT OFF The functional rear spoiler rises at 75 mph to increase down force. It retracts once the car has slowed to 45 mph.

Chevrolet Corvette

THE NEW CORVETTE is a bargain among high-performance cars, delivering ferocious acceleration, precise handling, and excellent braking for thousands of dollars less than competitors such as the Porsche 911 and Jaguar F-Type. And the driving experience can be fairly refined or wild, depending on your mood.

Punching the throttle is an eye-opener. The direct-injected 460-hp, 6.2-liter V8 helped it post a blistering 0-to-60-mph acceleration time of 4.3 seconds. From a start, our Stingray shoots forward with seemingly boundless torque and a throaty bark.

This Vette also offers quick reflexes, flat cornering, fantastic brakes, and less of the old nose-heavy sensation of older models. But it's still a wide car that's ultimately more about power than grace, and the best place to explore its full potential is on a track.

With the driving-mode selector in "Touring," the Vette is a relatively refined cruiser. Ride comfort is tolerable, the steering is light enough for effortless parking, and the restrained exhaust sound lets you tool around without alienating the neighbors.

Dial the selector to "Track" and the steering tightens, the exhaust bellow becomes more intense, the engine steps up with rev matching for downshifts, and the stability control loosens its grip, allowing some sideways sliding while still keeping the car on its path. Stability control can be completely switched off, but if you do so you'd better keep your wits about you and have your insurance paid up; going solo without electronic aids can bite you with this car.

"Sport" is an in-between mode that we

found suitable for everyday driving.

Braking performance is superb, with the car stopping from 60 mph in a mere 107 feet.

A major improvement in the redesign is the upgraded interior quality. You're treated to comfortable, supportive, and well-tailored seats. The MyLink touch-screen infotainment system lets you access the audio, phone, and navigation functions through simple controls. An optional head-up display can keep you abreast of vitals, such as engine rpm and the gear you're in. And, yes, the instrument panel can display the posted speed limit for the road you're driving on.

The easy-opening rear hatch reveals a modest cargo area that's sufficient for golf clubs or groceries. It's also easy to remove and store the roof panel for some open-air driving.

The Corvette's thrills come with a price, however. The shifter for the seven-speed manual transmission feels somewhat vague, and the clutch is heavy. When loafing along, you're forced into first-to-fourth gear shifts for fuel economy, which is annoying.

Near-acrobatic skills are required to get in and out of the low cabin. Visibility is lousy, especially when parking, although the standard backup camera helps. And on a long haul, the noise reverberating in the cargo area becomes exhausting.

Gripes aside, this is clearly the best Corvette ever, with a satisfying driving experience and an improved cabin.

Best version to get. Any Vette will deliver plenty of performance. If you have any high-performance-driving intentions, go for the Z51 version, with its larger wheels and tires, more capable brakes, and other upgrades.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Acceleration, handling, braking, engine sound, controls, performance for the price, fit and finish
LOWS	Ride, noise, access, visibility, shifter
TRIM LINE	Z51 3LT
DRIVETRAIN	460-hp, 6.2-liter V8, seven-speed manual transmission; rear-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Z51 Performance Package, dual roof package, chrome aluminum wheels, magnetic ride control, multimode performance exhaust
TESTED PRICE	\$73,260

More test findings

BRAKING	Excellent, with very short braking distances on dry pavement.
HEADLIGHTS	HID lamps provide good forward and side visibility and a bright and uniform pattern.
ACCESS	A very low stance, wide sills, and protruding dashboard interfere with access.
VISIBILITY	Limited by a long hood, small windows, and restricted rear view. The standard backup camera helps.
CABIN STORAGE	Almost nil.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Built into seatback.
CHILD SEATS	They will fit, but be sure that the front-passenger air bags are off.



TRACK OR TOURING?

A knob adjusts driving modes, altering the suspension, steering, and sound to fit.

BMW M235i

MANY BMW PURISTS are lamenting the, well, softening of the automaker's "Ultimate Driving Machine" edict in favor of more comfort, luxury, and technology in recent models. In most cases, we feel the automaker has achieved a good balance between performance and livability, but, yes, certain models are missing that razor-sharp handling edge we'd grown to expect.

The new M235i, on the other hand, is a fresh, exhilarating coupe that has been faithfully forged in the classic BMW mold. The car feels taut, quick, and eager. In short, it's a joy to drive.

The M235i is powered by a potent 320-hp, 3.0-liter turbocharged six-cylinder engine that's mated to either an eight-speed automatic transmission or, as in our car, a slick six-speed manual.

Accompanied by a satisfyingly sonorous exhaust, the M235i responds instantly to every prod to the throttle, delivering smooth, abundant torque and high-end punch. Working with the smooth and progressive clutch, the manual shifter is a delight to use. And the car's 25 mph overall is commendable.

The "M" designation, which identifies performance versions crafted by BMW's in-house tuners, brings a sport-tuned suspension and steering, upgraded brakes, and Michelin Pilot Super Sport performance tires. Our car has screaming-red leather upholstery, which fits the spirit of this coupe's fun-to-drive personality.

The M235i responds to your steering with

instant turn-in response and barely any body lean. The suspension feels tied down yet absorbent, although uneven pavement provokes short, quick body motions that make the ride a bit jittery. On the track, the M was capable and poised, with tenacious cornering grip and balanced behavior at its limits. It posted a higher maximum speed in our avoidance maneuver than even the Chevrolet Corvette (see page 51).

The beautifully finished cabin is tastefully accented by "M" badges here and there, and the sculpted seats provide comfortable support. There's ample room up front, but the rear seat is very tight.

Like all modern BMWs, the M235i has the latest iDrive infotainment system—quirks and all—which is managed by a multifunction controller on the center console and has a clear color screen in the dash. The system works well, but it takes getting used to.

The thrill might be back with the M235i, but it's not a cheap thrill. The base price for the M is \$43,100, and adding a couple of option packages pushed our car to \$50,400. That's a fairly high price per pound. Still, for the performance it provides, driving enthusiasts will probably savor every ounce.

Best options to get. Most versions come with the \$2,300 Premium Package, which includes leather seats and keyless access. Our car also included the \$2,150 Technology Package, adding navigation, apps, enhanced Bluetooth, and other goodies. Heated seats cost \$500. A backup camera, standard on a \$17,000 Honda Fit, goes for an extra \$950.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Acceleration, handling, braking, front-seat comfort, quietness
LOWS	Rear-seat room, some controls
TRIM LINE	M235i
DRIVETRAIN	320-hp, 3.0-liter turbocharged six-cylinder engine; six-speed manual transmission; rear-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Premium and Technology packages, heated seats, Harman/Kardon stereo, metallic paint
TESTED PRICE	\$50,400

More test findings

BRAKING	Extremely short stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	Standard xenon HID's are bright and uniform, but they are short on distance.
ACCESS	Large door openings help in the front. Rear access is tight but relatively good for a two-door car.
VISIBILITY	Thin upright pillars help. A backup camera is available only as an option.
CABIN STORAGE	Very little open storage.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Rear restraints are at a good height for protection.
CHILD SEATS	Limited access and rear-seat room make it difficult to install child seats.



HOT SEAT The standard sports seats are very supportive without feeling confining.

ROAD-TEST
SCORE

87



Chevrolet SS

TO THE CASUAL ONLOOKER, there are few clues that this new Chevy sedan is anything more than another comfy, four-door cruiser. The aggressive front-end styling, dual stainless-steel exhaust tips, and a muscular stance hint at the hidden potential of the SS. But it's not until you dip into the throttle, hear the throaty exhaust rumble, and feel the G-force press you back into your seat that you become aware that under the hood beats the potent heart of a Corvette.

Built by Holden, GM's Australian division, the rear-wheel-drive SS blends the spacious, comfortable cabin of a large sedan with a 415-hp, 6.2-liter V8 adapted from the last-generation Chevrolet Corvette. It also delivers acceleration and handling prowess that approaches such European super-sedans as the BMW M5 and Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG but at a price that's about \$40,000 lower.

Mated to a six-speed automatic transmission, the V8 delivered 0-to-60-mph sprints in a super-swift 5.1 seconds, which is only a second slower than the new, redesigned Corvette Stingray (see page 51). Clearly, you won't buy this car for its gas mileage; we measured only 17 mpg overall, which approaches the consumption of a large SUV such as the Chevy Tahoe.

The SS is taut, agile, and tied down, with pinpoint handling and tenacious cornering grip. Minimal body lean and quick, well-weighted steering make it fun to drive. On

the track the SS was a pure joy, with balanced, predictable behavior and a nicely tuned stability-control system. The ride is firm, but the SS doesn't beat you up with an overly stiff suspension as do certain other high-performance cars. Exhaust and tire noise are noticeable but not overbearing.

Performance aside, the SS is an executive express par excellence. Access is easy to the sumptuous cockpit. The rear seat is very hospitable. Controls are simple to use. And the trunk holds enough luggage to sustain a lengthy family trek.

The SS comes just one way: fully loaded. All versions have leather power seats, navigation, automatic parking assist, a head-up display, and such performance gear as Brembo brakes and sporty summer tires (which you'll need to swap in snowy conditions). Standard electronic safety features include forward-collision, lane-departure, and blind-spot warning systems.

Our car carried a \$47,170 sticker price, which might seem like a lot for a Chevy sedan. But the inviting blend of performance and livability make the SS a convincing sports sedan that boasts a Vette's soul but without that car's pushy personality.

Best version to get. Selecting a Chevy SS is simplicity itself. Pick from five colors and choose from two options: a \$900 sunroof and a \$500 full-sized spare tire with matching aluminum wheel.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Acceleration, handling, braking, exhaust note, interior room, easy-to-use controls, relatively refined, loaded features list
LOWS	Thirsty for fuel, no exterior trunk release, summer tires are unusable in snow
TRIM LINE	—
DRIVETRAIN	415-hp, 6.2-liter V8; six-speed automatic transmission; rear-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Sunroof, spare tire
TESTED PRICE	\$47,170

More test findings

BRAKING	Extremely short stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	HID low beams provide good intensity. Halogen high beams add distance.
ACCESS	Easy through large doors.
VISIBILITY	Good, with large windows, moderate-width pillars, and standard backup camera and blind-spot monitoring.
CABIN STORAGE	Lots of easy-to-access storage options.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	There is no restraint in the rear-center position, and the seatback is not high enough to provide protection.
CHILD SEATS	Three child seats can be secured in the rear seat.



IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT With comfortable side bolsters, the front seats hug you in corners without being restrictive.



Ford Fiesta



Chevrolet Spark



Mitsubishi Mirage

Ford Fiesta tops a mixed group

Subcompacts are frugal and affordable but come with trade-offs

With demand for economical, fuel-efficient cars spiking in recent years, showrooms have seen a rapid increase of small, entry-level subcompacts. Usually priced in the mid-teens, these pint-sized vehicles are friendly on the budget and can stretch your fuel dollars with gas mileage in the 30-something-mpg range.

Subcompacts are also easy to maneuver and park, which comes in handy in tight urban driving.

But that's about where the advantages end. And there are often a number of drawbacks that can make driving a subcompact wearisome over time.

With little sound insulation, these inexpensive cars are usually noisy inside. Their small engines don't provide very quick acceleration. The ride is often stiff or choppy. And the cabins are often tight and cheaply trimmed. Keep in mind, too, that a smaller car is inherently less safe in a crash with a larger vehicle. Even subcompacts with good crash ratings will usually come out on the losing end of an encounter with a large car, SUV, or truck.

Those types of trade-offs are clear in two of the three subcompacts we tested—the Chevrolet Spark and the Mitsubishi Mirage—which turned in some of the lowest scores we've seen in recent years: 42 and 29, respectively. Both have long lists of deficiencies, including noisy interiors, patience-testing acceleration, and cheaply outfitted interiors. In addition, the Spark's ride is very stiff and the Mirage's handling is clumsy. These are cars that we can't, in good conscience, recommend that anyone buy.

The Ford Fiesta, which received a new 1.0-liter turbocharged EcoBoost three-cylinder engine for 2014, is one of the few subcompacts that's any fun to drive because of its agile handling, decent ride, and relatively quiet cabin. Its 66 test score places it among the top three in this class, slightly behind the Hyundai Accent and the four-cylinder Fiesta we previously tested.

Our three-cylinder Fiesta SE was almost

\$19,000, however, which is pricey for this class. For that amount or a little more, you could buy a good compact car, such as a Hyundai Elantra. For a couple thousand less, you could get one of several other good subcompacts.

With the Fiesta and Mirage, we measured excellent overall fuel economy of 35 and 37 mpg, respectively. The Spark provided only 31 mpg overall, which is unimpressive given its tiny size and meager power. Of course, you can now find similar or better fuel economy in compact and even midsized sedans that are roomier, quieter, quicker, more comfortable, and notably more pleasant to drive.

With as-tested prices of about \$16,000, the Spark and Mirage might seem like attractive buys. But if your budget is pushing you in that direction, you'll do better by buying a used car. For about the same money, you could get a larger and better overall vehicle, such as a late-model Mazda3 or a Subaru Impreza, or a slightly older Toyota Camry. All three did well in our testing, have had consistently good reliability, and made our list of the best used cars in our 2014 Annual Auto Issue. You might give up some mpg, but you'll probably be happier down the road.

Ratings Subcompact cars

In performance order.

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
○ Fair
● Poor

✓ Recommended

	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
Rec. Rank				0 100 P F G V G E		
1	Hyundai Accent SE (MT)	\$16,695		68	●	32
2	Ford Fiesta SES (4-cyl., MT)	17,795		67	●	32
3	Ford Fiesta SE (3-cyl., MT)	18,720	●	66	new	35
✓ 4	Mazda2 Sport (MT)	14,770		64	○	33
✓ 5	Mazda2 Touring	17,075		62	○	30
✓ 6	Kia Rio EX	17,475		62	○	29
7	Nissan Versa Note SV	17,495		61	new	31
✓ 8	Chevrolet Sonic LTZ (1.4T, MT)	19,870		60	○	30
9	Toyota Yaris LE	17,290		47	NA	32
10	Chevrolet Spark 1LT	15,820	●	42	NA	31
11	Scion iQ	16,205		36	NA	34
12	Mitsubishi Mirage ES	16,050	●	29	new	37
13	Smart ForTwo Passion	15,355		25	NA	39

Why some models are not recommended. The reliability of the Ford Fiesta (4-cyl.) has been much worse than average. The Toyota Yaris, Chevrolet Spark, Scion iQ, Mitsubishi Mirage, and Smart ForTwo scored too low in our tests. The Fiesta (3-cyl.), Nissan Versa Note, and Mirage are too new for us to have reliability data. The Hyundai Accent and Mirage got a Poor rating in an IIHS crash test.

Ford Fiesta

UPDATED FOR 2014, the Fiesta is one of those rare subcompacts that feels like a solid, substantial car. It offers a refined ride and a fairly quiet cabin, and it's fun to drive.

New for this year is an optional 123-hp, 1.0-liter turbocharged three-cylinder EcoBoost engine, which delivered an impressive 35 mpg overall and 46 on the highway in our tests. That's 3 mpg better than what we measured with the standard 1.6-liter four-cylinder when matched with a manual transmission. The 1.0 also provides notably quicker acceleration.

Still, the three-cylinder might not be ideal for many people. It comes with only a five-speed manual transmission, so plan on shifting for yourself. The engine has a narrow power band, so you have to shift often to get the most out of it, but the shifter and the clutch operate smoothly. And it adds \$995 to the car's sticker price.

To put that into perspective, if you drove 12,000 miles per year, the larger 1.6 engine would use about 25 gallons of gas more per year. At \$4 per gallon, it would take 10 years to recoup the extra outlay for the 1.0-liter.

The Fiesta is an agile little car, and even though suspension revisions for 2014 dialed back its handling some, it is still responsive, secure, and poised. Of course, you can still get a super-fun Fiesta if you spring for the costlier ST hot-hatch version, but that's really a different cup of salsa. The ride is mostly supple and controlled, which is

unusual for a subcompact. And the cabin stays relatively quiet.

For such a small car, leg and head room are generous in the front seats. But the rear seat is very tight and practically useless for adults. Accommodating any passengers requires scooting the front seat forward.

Another sore point: Whether you choose the base radio or the optional MyFord Touch infotainment system, the controls are overly complicated. The basic radio has a lot of buttons splayed over the center dash but no tuning knob. And navigating its menus is tedious.

In the Fiesta, the MyFord Touch screen has been shrunk from 8 inches to 6.5, which makes it even more difficult to accurately find and tap the correct onscreen buttons quickly.

Best version to get. We'd go for a regular Fiesta SE with the 1.6-liter engine. Skip the complicated MyFord Touch infotainment system, especially with the Fiesta's smaller screen. But spring for the bargain-priced \$290 Comfort Package, with its heated seats and automatic climate control.

We wouldn't pay the extra \$995 for the SFE package with the 1.0-liter EcoBoost engine. Even if you like shifting manually, the 3-mpg advantage doesn't seem worth the extra money. Moreover, in our tests of the 1.6-liter Fiesta, the automatic transmission got 1 mpg better than the manual version. So there's even less incentive to go for the three-cylinder.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Handling, braking, fuel economy, relatively comfortable riding, and quiet for a subcompact
LOWS	Controls, tight rear seat, rear visibility, no automatic transmission with 1.0-liter, engine, has narrow power band, relatively expensive
TRIM LINE	SE
DRIVETRAIN	123-hp, 1.0-liter, three-cylinder engine; five-speed manual transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	1.0-liter EcoBoost engine package, Comfort Package (heated seats, automatic climate control), door graphics
TESTED PRICE	\$18,720

More test findings

BRAKING	Very short stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	They light a very good distance ahead, although the pattern isn't uniform.
ACCESS	Easy enough in front, tight in back.
VISIBILITY	Thin windshield pillars help, but the hatchback's rear window is small.
CABIN STORAGE	Very little.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The rear-center restraint is not tall enough.
CHILD SEATS	Rear-facing seats leave limited room for front occupants.



NO AUTO With the manual transmission, you'll have to shift often to keep the engine in the optimal power band.





Chevrolet Spark

SOME BUYERS MIGHT be tempted by the Spark's low price, rich features, or cheerful colors. But those benefits don't begin to make up for the car's many shortcomings. This tiny car is agonizingly slow and relentlessly noisy, and the ride is stiff and jittery. Plus the interior is spartan and poorly trimmed, and it feels insubstantial.

Powering the Spark is a loud, coarse, and anemic 84-hp, 1.2-liter engine. For 2014 it's mated to an unrefined and unresponsive continuously variable transmission that makes the car feel even more lethargic. Ours took a lengthy 12.8 seconds to accelerate from 0 to 60 mph, which is one of the slowest times we've recorded in recent years and might be a concern when you're trying to merge onto a busy highway.

You'd expect excellent fuel economy from such a small car, but we measured only 31 mpg overall and 39 on the highway. That's not bad overall, but it's less frugal than several larger, quicker, and more substantial cars, such as the compact Mazda3 or Toyota Corolla, or even the midsize Mazda6.

The Spark's small size makes it highly maneuverable, so parking is a snap. Although its handling is very secure, the car lacks agility in everyday driving as well as the frisky feel of, say, the Fiat 500.

What the Spark can do is seat four adults surprisingly comfortably. Inside, you'll find a tall driving position with plenty of head room. You can't escape the cabin's narrow confines, though. And with no telescoping steering wheel available, almost all of us wanted to pull the wheel closer.

Higher-trim Sparks come with a touch-

screen audio system that has plenty of connectivity features. That seems like a treat in such an inexpensive car, but the system is tedious to use. It has no knobs or traditional buttons. Most functions are performed through the touch screen, but audio volume and power are controlled by using fussy, touch-sensitive switches. Sometimes they don't respond to your touch at all, and sometimes they go too far.

The screen has clear graphics, but some onscreen buttons are tiny. And many functions require several taps of the screen to get what you want. There's no way to tune directly to an FM station; you have to use "seek" or select the station from a list.

The Spark's hatchback design lends it some cargo-carrying versatility. But it has no spare tire, only an inflator kit with tire sealant.

Best version to get. If you're intent on buying a Spark, step up to the 1LT version for the power locks and windows as well as keyless entry. The best version we've driven is the electric Spark EV, but that's available only in California and Oregon.



LACK OF CONTROLS

The absence of knobs and buttons makes using the radio a fussy process.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Braking, access, relatively roomy for its size
LOWS	Noise, ride, acceleration, transmission, agility, front-seat comfort, complicated radio
TRIM LINE	1LT
DRIVETRAIN	84-hp, 1.2-liter four-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	None
TESTED PRICE	\$15,820

More test findings

BRAKING	Short stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	Low beams provide very good visibility, but high beams are not up to par.
ACCESS	Easy in front, but the rear exterior door handle is awkward to use.
VISIBILITY	There's lots of glass, but thick pillars get in the way. No backup camera is available.
CABIN STORAGE	Modest, with only small bins.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Tall enough to protect most passengers.
CHILD SEATS	Top-tether anchors on the sides of the cargo area are easy to miss.



CVT DOWNGRADE The continuously variable transmission sacrifices 1 mpg and makes the Spark feel agonizingly slow.

ROAD-TEST
SCORE

29



Mitsubishi Mirage

IN SOME WAYS, the Mirage lives up to its name. Its low sticker price and excellent fuel economy may conjure up an inviting vision of a good, economical runabout. But that illusion quickly dissipates when you drive this tiny, miserable car.

The Mirage is a small hatchback built in Thailand and powered by a weak, loud, and vibrating 74-hp, 1.2-liter three-cylinder engine. Paired with a continuously variable transmission, the engine's single redeeming quality is that it provides an excellent 37 mpg overall and 47 on the highway, making the Mirage one of the most frugal cars we've tested that isn't a hybrid or diesel.

Among the Mirage's few other positives is a compliant ride, a surprisingly accommodating rear seat, and an impressive list of standard features for its \$16,050 price tag. Those include keyless push-button ignition, cruise control, automatic climate control, a 140-watt audio system, and Bluetooth capability in the ES version.

Otherwise, the Mirage's driving experience is atrocious. Acceleration is sluggish. The cabin is filled with engine roar, road rumble, and wind howl. And its handling is so clumsy that several testers found it disconcerting.

Pronounced body lean, even in low-speed corners, gives one the sensation of being in a small boat. Some ordinary twists and curves elicit squeals of protest from the tires. And the steering is slow, requires hefty input, and is devoid of feedback. When pushed to its handling limits in our avoidance maneuver, the Mirage felt disconcerting but was ultimately secure.

Despite the Mirage's short, narrow dimensions, there's relatively decent room inside. But the seat cushion is too high, and the steering wheel lacks a telescopic adjustment, with most drivers finding it to be a very long reach.

The front seats feel like slabs of hard foam, with little contouring or cushioning. For a car this size, it's surprising that two adults can fit OK in the rear seat with palatable leg, knee, and head room. But it's too narrow for three to fit comfortably. The cabin is drab, with some exposed screws, and feels insubstantial.

The controls are simple, with large buttons and knobs. But the radio lacks a tuning knob. And its single-line display is a hassle for scrolling through phone contacts or iPod lists. You can control your phone and USB-tethered iPod with voice commands.

The Mirage seems to put cost first and almost everything else second. And it shows. With a tally of only 29 points, it's the lowest-scoring car we've tested in a very long time.

Best version to get. We suggest that you steer well clear of buying a Mirage. But if you're set on it, keep it cheap. The base DE model has power locks and windows, and a USB port; Bluetooth is available as an accessory. With the automatic transmission, a DE costs \$14,805. An additional \$1,200 buys a top-level Mirage ES, with a push-button start, an automatic climate system, and steering-wheel audio and voice controls. A backup camera is available only with the optional \$900 navigation package, but that pushes the car's price to almost \$17,000. It's not worth it.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Fuel economy, turning circle, relatively roomy rear seat, hatchback versatility, feature content
LOWS	Clumsy handling, noise, vibration, acceleration, feels cheap and insubstantial, IIHS small-overlap test
TRIM LINE	ES
DRIVETRAIN	74-hp, 1.2-liter three-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	None
TESTED PRICE	\$16,050

More test findings

BRAKING	Relatively long stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	Limited forward range and intensity can reduce a driver's ability to react in time to something in front.
ACCESS	Requires a bit of ducking. Awkward old-fashioned door handles.
VISIBILITY	OK. But a backup camera is only available with the navigation option.
CABIN STORAGE	Very limited.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Rear-center restraint is not tall enough to provide protection.
CHILD SEATS	Front-passenger seat needs to be moved forward to accommodate some rear-facing child seats, limiting front leg room.



MIXED BAG Upscale features, such as automatic climate control, don't compensate for the car's many basic shortcomings.

Cars \ Comparison



VERSION	Porsche 911	Chevrolet Corvette	BMW 2 Series	Chevrolet SS
TRIM LINE	Carrera S	3LT	M235i	—
PRICE: BASE/TESTED ^①	\$98,900/\$110,630	\$53,800/\$73,260	\$43,100/\$50,400	\$43,475/\$47,170
DRIVETRAIN				
Engine	3.8-liter 6-cyl. (400 hp)	6.2-liter V8 (460 hp)	3.0-liter 6-cyl. (320 hp) turbo	6.2-liter V8 (415 hp)
Transmission	7-speed manual	7-speed manual	6-speed manual	6-speed automatic
Drive wheels	Rear	Rear	Rear	Rear
TIRES TESTED	Pirelli P Zero, size 245/35ZR20 91Y (front), 295/30ZR20 101Y (rear)	Michelin Pilot Super Sport ZP, size P245/35ZR19 89Y (front), P285/30ZR20 95Y (rear)	Michelin Pilot Super Sport, size 225/40ZR18 88Y (front), 245/35ZR18 92Y (rear)	Bridgestone Potenza RE050A, size 245/40R19 98Y (front), 275/35R19 100Y (rear)
RATINGS				
PERFORMANCE				
Acceleration	●	●	●	●
0 to 60 mph, sec.	4.1	4.3	5.2	5.1
45 to 65 mph, sec.	3.0	3.1	3.6	3.3
Quarter-mile, sec.	12.4	12.6	13.8	13.5
Transmission	●	●	●	●
Routine handling	●	●	●	●
Emergency handling	●	●	●	●
Avoidance maneuver, speed, mph	59.5	57.5	58.5	56.0
Braking	●	●	●	●
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	108/119	107/121	115/128	118/124
Headlights	●	○	●	○
COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE				
Ride	●	●	○	○
Noise	●	●	●	○
Driving position	●	○	●	●
Front-seat comfort	●	●	●	●
Rear-seat comfort	●	NA	●	●
Access	●	●	●	●
Controls and displays	○	●	●	●
Interior fit and finish	●	●	●	●
Trunk	●	○	●	○
PREDICTED RELIABILITY	●	New	New	New
FUEL				
Overall mpg	23	20	25	17
City/highway mpg	16/32	14/28	19/31	12/23
Type	premium	premium	premium	premium
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, miles	16.9/395	18.5/370	13.7/340	19.0/330
Annual cost, 12K miles	\$2,050 @ \$4.00/gallon	\$2,410 @ \$4.00/gallon	\$1,945 @ \$4.00/gallon	\$2,765 @ \$4.00/gallon
SAFETY				
CRASH TESTS				
IIHS moderate/small-overlap frontal	NA/NA	NA/NA	Good/Good	NA/NA
IIHS side	NA	NA	Good	NA
IIHS rear	NA	NA	NA	NA
IIHS roof strength	NA	NA	Good	NA
NHTSA front, driver/passenger	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA
NHTSA side, driver/rear	NA/NA	NA/—	NA/NA	NA/NA
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA
AIR BAGS				
Side, front/rear	std./no	std./—	std./no	std./no
Head protection	standard	no	standard	standard
SPECIFICATIONS				
DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT				
Length/width/height, in.	177/71/51	177/74/49	175/70/56	196/75/58
Wheelbase, in.	96	107	106	115
Turning circle, ft.	38	38	37	39
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	3,235 (38/62)	3,470 (49/51)	3,450 (53/47)	4,025 (52/48)
Maximum load, lb.	660	525	805	915
Luggage, suitcases+duffels	1+0	2+1	2+0	3+1
Towing capacity, lb.	NR	NR	NR	NR
INTERIOR ROOM				
Front shoulder room, in.	50.0	53.0	54.0	58.5
Front leg room, in.	43.0	41.0	42.0	44.0
Front head room, in. ^②	4.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Rear shoulder room, in.	47.0	—	51.5	57.5
Rear leg room, in.	19.0	—	25.0	30.0
Rear head room, in. ^②	0.0	—	0.0	2.0

^① Based on sticker price at time of purchase. ^② Above a person 5'9" tall.

Index

This page lists all full reports and selected shorter reports. **Bold** type indicates Ratings reports or brand-name discussions; *italic* type, corrections, follow-ups, or updates. A search of the most recent Ratings of products is

A		
Activity trackers	Nov 13, 8	
Advertising		
annoying	Jun 14, 11	
deceptive	Jun 14, 60	
tricks	Mar 14, 13	
Aging, healthy	Jun 14, 37	
Air conditioners	Jul 14, 51	
portable	Aug 14, 45	
Airfares, undisclosed fees on	Aug 14, 6	
Antibiotics in food	Aug 14, 6	
Appliances		
Kenwood Cooking Chef: Don't Buy	Feb 14, 46	
Arsenic		
FDA test results	Mar 14, 14	
federal guidelines	Oct 13, 15; Dec 13, 6	
AUTOMOBILE RATINGS:		
Acura MDX	Oct 13, 53	
Acura RLX	Sep 13, 52	
Audi A7	Mar 14, 54	
BMW 328d	Jul 14, 56	
BMW M235i	Aug 14, 51	
BMW X5	Jun 14, 50	
Cadillac CTS	Mar 14, 54	
Chevrolet Corvette	Aug 14, 51	
Chevrolet Cruze Turbo Diesel	Oct 13, 53	
Chevrolet Impala	Sep 13, 52	
Chevrolet Silverado 1500	Nov 13, 58	
Chevrolet Spark	Aug 14, 56	
Chevrolet SS	Aug 14, 55	
Dodge Dart	Jul 14, 62	
Dodge Durango	Feb 14, 53	
Fiat 500 Abarth	Jan 14, 52	
Fiat 500L	Dec 13, 67	
Ford Fiesta	Aug 14, 56	
Ford Fiesta ST	Jan 14, 52	
Ford Focus ST	Nov 13, 58	
Ford Fusion SE	Feb 14, 53	
Honda Accord Hybrid	Jul 14, 56	
Honda Civic	Jul 14, 62	
Honda Crosstour	Nov 13, 58	
Honda Odyssey	Nov 13, 58	
Hyundai Santa Fe	Sep 13, 52	
Infiniti Q50	Dec 13, 67	
Jaguar XF	Sep 13, 52	
Jeep Cherokee	May 14, 56	
Jeep Grand Cherokee diesel	Jul 14, 56	
Kia Cadenza	Oct 13, 53	
Kia Forte	Sep 13, 52	
Kia Soul	Oct 13, 53	
Land Rover Range Rover	Jun 14, 54	
Lexus IS 250	Dec 13, 67	
Mazda3	May 14, 56	
Mercedes-Benz CLA250	Feb 14, 53	
Mercedes-Benz E250 BlueTec	Mar 14, 54	
Mercedes-Benz GL350 BlueTec	Oct 13, 53	
Mercedes-Benz GLK	Jan 14, 52	
Mitsubishi Mirage	Aug 14, 56	
Mitsubishi Outlander	Oct 13, 53	
Nissan Rogue	Jun 14, 54	
Nissan Versa Note	Dec 13, 67	
Porsche 911	Aug 14, 51	
Ram 1500	Nov 13, 58	
Range Rover Sport	Jun 14, 50	
Scion iC	Mar 14, 54	
Subaru XV Crosstrek Hybrid	Jul 14, 56	
Toyota Corolla	Jan 14, 52	
Toyota Highlander	Jun 14, 48	
Volkswagen CC	Feb 14, 53	
Volkswagen Jetta	Jan 14, 52	
Volkswagen Passat	Jul 14, 62	
AUTOMOBILES AND AUTOMOTIVE EQUIPMENT:		
accident reporting	Sep 13, 15	
backup cameras, DOT lawsuit	Jan 14, 6	
batteries	Nov 13, 54	
best & worst for 2014	Feb 14, 50	
buying gripes	Apr 14, 6	
buying tips	Apr 14, 26	
Chevrolet Corvette	May 14, 54	
Chevrolet SS	May 14, 55	
child car seats	Jun 14, 17	
testing	Jun 14, 6	
crash-test results		
changed recommendations from	Dec 13, 16	
dashboard distractions	Sep 13, 6	
driving monitors	Jul 14, 55	
electrical	Aug 14, 49	
emergencies	Jul 14, 7	
emissions standards, Tier 3	Jun 14, 6	
fatalities, preventing	Oct 13, 48	
features	Apr 14, 8; Apr 14, 9	
flat-tire kits	Jan 14, 49	
Ford hybrids	Feb 14, 57	
fuel economy	Apr 14, 7	
fuel saving tips	Jul 14, 47	
GM recall	Sep 13, 16	
GMC	Aug 14, 8	
infotainment systems	Feb 14, 58	
Jeep voluntary recall	Sep 13, 16	
manufacturers	Apr 14, 13	
mechanics' comments	Mar 14, 9	
Mercedes-Benz S550	May 14, 54	
model-year 2013 review	Oct 13, 46	
names	Oct 13, 7	
new for 2014	Oct 13, 43; Apr 14, 6	
overlooked	Apr 14, 5	
owner cost	Apr 14, 8	
owner satisfaction	Jan 14, 50	
Ratings, 2014	Apr 14, 28	
recalls & technical service bulletins	Jul 14, 14	
reliability	Dec 13, 60; Apr 14, 94	
rental, saving on	Jan 14, 10	
safety ratings	Apr 14, 79	
safety trends	Oct 13, 6	
self-driving	Apr 14, 16	
smart-phone mounts	Feb 14, 49	
tires	Apr 14, 24	
high- and ultra-high-performance	Nov 13, 50	
top picks for 2014	Apr 14, 10	
Toyota Highlander	May 14, 55	
trim cleaners and protectants	May 14, 53; Jul 14, 5	
under \$25,000	Apr 14, 9	
used cars	Apr 14, 84	
buying tips	Apr 14, 88	
common problems	Apr 14, 90	
reliable	Apr 14, 86	
warranties, extended	Apr 14, 21	
winter preparation	Dec 13, 10	
B		
Bacon	Nov 13, 8	
Banks & financial institutions		
switching	Jan 14, 6	
Batteries	Jan 14, 7	
Bed Handles recall	Aug 14, 14	
Beef cuts	Jun 14, 8	
Blenders	Sep 13, 50	
Hamilton Beach Java Blend Brewer/Blender	Aug 14, 44	
Blood glucose monitors	Nov 13, 43	
Broth & stock, chicken	Nov 13, 10	
Bugs, summer	Jun 14, 14	
C		
Camcorders	Aug 14, 43	
Cameras, digital	Dec 13, 39; Feb 14, 5	
Carbon monoxide poisoning	Feb 14, 16	
Cereals	Sep 13, 18	
Chain saws	Oct 13, 26	
Chicken safety	Feb 14, 30	
Chips and crunchy snacks	Oct 13, 8	
Chocolates	Feb 14, 8; May 14, 7	
Cigarettes, electronic	Mar 14, 12	
Cleaning		
kitchen	Feb 14, 24	
Clothes dryers	Dec 13, 50; Aug 14, 36	
Coffee drinks, iced	Aug 14, 8	
Coffeemakers	Dec 13, 55	
automated French press-style	Jan 14, 41	
Hamilton Beach Java Blend Brewer/Blender	Aug 14, 44	
single-serving	Sep 13, 48	
College tuition, Tennessee, free	Jul 14, 6	
Computers	Dec 13, 33	
laptops	Aug 14, 28	
printers	Dec 13, 37	
efficient use	Aug 14, 44	
software, security	Jun 14, 46	
tablet	Sep 13, 47; Dec 13, 30; Feb 14, 45; Mar 14, 44; Jul 14, 50; Aug 14, 28	
Consumer advocates,		
Kentucky Equal Justice Center	May 14, 6	
Consumer Reports		
President Jim Guest	Jan 14, 6	
progress	Feb 14, 6	
Consumer websites,		
SaferProducts.gov, lawsuit	Jul 14, 6	
Consumers Union, HealthLawHelper.org	Nov 13, 6	
Cooking, outdoor, safety	Aug 14, 10	
Cooktops	Feb 14, 24; Jul 14, 34	
Cosmetics, California Department		
of Public Health safety site	May 14, 6	
Countertops, kitchen	Jul 14, 28	
Credit-card safety	Jun 14, 16	
push for standards	May 14, 6	
Credit scores		
errors in	Jul 14, 6	
FICO	Feb 14, 10	
Crowdfunding risks	Aug 14, 6	
D		
Debit cards, RushCards	May 14, 6	
Dehumidifiers	Jun 14, 43	
Dietary supplements		
safety	Nov 13, 6	
Dips, Greek yogurt	Jul 14, 8	
Dish detergent	Oct 13, 40	
Dishwashers	Jul 14, 44	

available on our website, at ConsumerReports.org. Note that because reports posted on our site are periodically updated, publication dates on the Web index may not reflect when a given report appeared in the magazine.

Drugs				Pots, Pauli Never Burn Stock Pot	Dec 13, 9
bottle flow regulators	Mar 14, 45				
generic	May 14, 12				
E				R	
Eggs	May 14, 11			Ranges	Feb 14, 24; Jul 14, 34
Electronics				Pro-style	Dec 13, 53
portable	Aug 14, 22			Refrigerators	Jan 14, 46; Jul 14, 40
shopping for	Dec 13, 21			Fhiaba Series MG Stand Plus	Dec 13, 54
10 top	Dec 13, 18			Registration, product	Feb 14, 8
Exercise equipment	Feb 14, 37			Repair vs. replacement	Feb 14, 18
F				Restaurants	
Fees, avoiding	Feb 14, 15			complaints	Aug 14, 11
Financial resolutions	Jan 14, 13			fast food	Aug 14, 15
Finder tags	Feb 14, 11			Reviews, online user	May 14, 13
Flooring	Jul 14, 31			Robocalls	Mar 14, 7
Flu shots	Mar 14, 11			S	
Food				Salad dressings	Jul 14, 9
fast	Aug 14, 15			Seasonings, slow-cooker	Jun 14, 9
fast, not as pictured	Feb 14, 12			Shopping	
"healthy"	May 14, 8			choices, too many	Mar 14, 16
labeling, misleading	Jan 14, 8			online	Dec 13, 14
not as pictured	Jun 14, 12			safety	Dec 13, 59
when to get rid of	Aug 14, 9			Smart home systems	Jun 14, 28
Food processors	Oct 13, 39; Jun 14, 42			Smoke & carbon monoxide	
401(k) plans	Sep 13, 22			alarm, Nest Protect	May 14, 9
Freezers, Frigidaire FKCH17F7HW				Snacks, mall	Dec 13, 10
convertible freezer/refrigerator	May 14, 51			Snow blowers	Feb 14, 47
Furniture, California toxicity laws	Mar 14, 6			Snow shovels	Mar 14, 10
G				Sore throats	Jan 14, 9
Generators	Oct 13, 24			Soup, chicken noodle	Jan 14, 11
Gift cards, city-backed	Jun 14, 6			Speakers, wireless	Jan 14, 42; Jun 14, 41
Gifts	Jan 14, 19			Store brands	Oct 13, 16
Grills, gas	Jun 14, 20			pharmacy	Jun 14, 7
Guacamole	Feb 14, 7			Stores	
H				appliance	Jul 14, 46
Hair dyes, temporary	May 14, 10			supermarkets	May 14, 16; Jun 14, 5; Jul 14, 5
Hair remover, No No	Dec 13, 8			Strollers, Truly Scrumptious	
Ham	Dec 13, 7			Travel System, unsafe	Dec 13, 16
Headphones	Dec 13, 43			Summer safety	Jun 14, 18
Health, 2013 news	Dec 13, 15			Sunscreens	Jul 14, 21
Health care				Surgery	Sep 13, 31
websites, patient portals	Jan 14, 16			heart	Aug 14, 32
Health clinics, walk-in	Aug 14, 13			Syrup, cancer risks	May 14, 14
Health insurance	Nov 13, 34; Dec 13, 5			T	
reform law	Nov 13, 30; Mar 14, 6; Mar 14, 8			Technical support	Aug 14, 30
High chairs, BeBeLove: safety risk	Nov 13, 14			Telecommunications services	May 14, 22
Home insurance	May 14, 40			mergers	Aug 14, 7
Hospitals	May 14, 44			Telephone services	
infections	Feb 14, 6			cellular	Jan 14, 26
I				cutting costs	Jan 14, 36; Jul 14, 13
Ice cream and gelato	Jun 14, 10			Sprint Spark	Jun 14, 42
Internet, Net neutrality rules	May 14, 6; Aug 14, 6			Telephones	
J				cellular	
Joints, replacement	Dec 13, 6			charging pads	Jan 14, 8
Juicers	Mar 14, 43			unlocking	Mar 14, 6
K				cordless	Dec 13, 56
Kitchen remodeling	Jul 14, 24			smart	Dec 13, 26; Jan 14, 26; Jan 14, 32
L				anti-distraction apps	Mar 14, 53
Laundry detergents	Aug 14, 40			Samsung Galaxy S 5	May 14, 51
Lawn care	May 14, 30			Television	Mar 14, 28
Lawn mowers & tractors	May 14, 33			antennas	Oct 13, 37
Leaf blowers	Nov 13, 41			mergers, Comcast-Time Warner	Jul 14, 6
Lightbulbs	Oct 13, 30; Jan 14, 24			sports blackouts	Feb 14, 6
LED, Philips Slimstyle A19	Jun 14, 42			Television sets	Dec 13, 23; Mar 14, 35
Light switches, Belkin WeMo remote	Feb 14, 9			Ultra HD	Jan 14, 42
Loans, payday, complaints	Feb 14, 6			3D printers	Dec 13, 54
Locators, personal	Jun 14, 8			Toasters & toaster ovens	Nov 13, 42
Locks, door	Jun 14, 28			Krupps FBC4 Convection	
M				Toaster Oven: Don't Buy	Mar 14, 45
Magnetic toys, high-powered, possible ban	Jan 14, 14			Toilet paper	May 14, 7
Mattresses	Mar 14, 20			Towels	
Meals, frozen	Feb 14, 24			Chill-Its 6602 Evaporative Cooling	Jun 14, 8
Media & music players,				paper	Sep 13, 11; Jan 14, 44
streaming	Sep 13, 45; Dec 13, 42			Toys, Buckyballs, recall settlement	Aug 14, 14
Microwave ovens	Feb 14, 28			Travel abroad	Aug 14, 12
differences by price	May 14, 50			Travel health	Jul 14, 12
Morning activities	Dec 13, 8			Trimmers, string	May 14, 39
O				U	
Online privacy & security	Jul 14, 15			Umbrella, GustBuster	Nov 13, 11
kids'	Oct 13, 6			V	
Organizers, closet	Mar 14, 11			Vacation homes, renter protection	May 14, 10
P				Vacuum cleaners	Nov 13, 44; Mar 14, 46
Packaging				hand and stick	Jan 14, 43
problems, long-standing	Oct 13, 10			Video boxes, Amazon Fire TV	Jul 14, 49
Packing	Dec 13, 9; Jul 14, 10			Video-game consoles	Dec 13, 44
Paints & stains				PlayStation 4 vs. Xbox One	Feb 14, 46
exterior	Jun 14, 24			W	
interior	Mar 14, 49			Wall ovens	Feb 14, 24; Jul 14, 34
Pharmacies	Mar 14, 24			Washing machines	Dec 13, 50; Aug 14, 36
Photography and photo sharing	Jun 14, 32			deep, short users and	Feb 14, 10
Pizza, frozen	Sep 13, 10			Watches, smart	May 14, 49
Popcorn	Mar 14, 8			Pebble smart watch	Dec 13, 11
				Samsung Gear 2	Jul 14, 50
				Watertight coatings, Rust-Oleum NeverWet	Jan 14, 9
				Wet wipes	Feb 14, 11
				Wines	Dec 13, 12
				white	Jul 14, 12

Goofs, glitches, gotchas

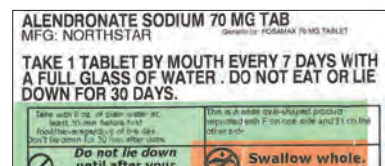


AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Spotted in Yuma, Ariz., the reader who mailed this in wonders whether this is a cheap snow-bird rental with matching guest house.

SUCH A DEAL!

Almost a whole penny of savings is offered on this Post Shredded Wheat cereal coupon.



A FULL GLASS OF WATER . DO NOT EAT OR LIE DOWN FOR 30 DAYS.

TAKE AS DIRECTED?

We haven't checked on how the reader who sent in this prescription is doing.



JUICY MISTAKE

The company says its product really does have orange juice, but the reader who sent in this misprinted label would have had to go online to know.

Model OWF - Observer Window Feeder

Simply attach the suction cups and hang on your window!

4. Using the facial oil from the side of your nose, rub finger on suction cup surface.

5. Press each cup firmly against window to force air out from beneath cup.

THE OILY BIRD GETS THE WORM

This bird feeder's instructions for attaching its suction cups to your window include step No. 4: "Using the facial oil from the side of your nose, rub finger on suction cup surface." So don't powder your nose first.



Find out **how much to pay for a new car** with our expanded local pricing information

The Consumer Reports New Car Price Report shows you what others really paid, regional dealer marketing fees, and other information to help you get a great deal on a new car.

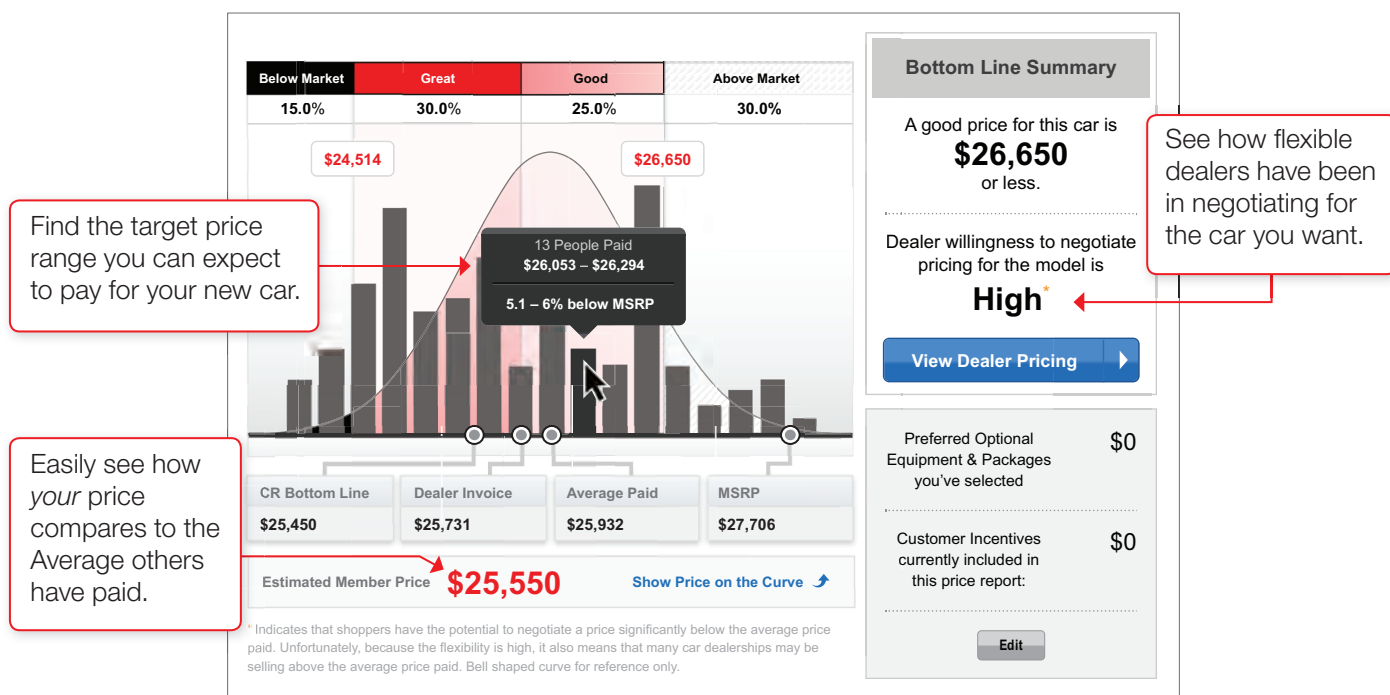
The enhanced Report now features an easy-to-read price curve that includes:

- Great, Good, and Above Market price ranges for your area
- The average price others paid for the same car
- The Build & Buy Service, providing a transparent car-buying experience through a network of pre-qualified dealers
- A rating of a dealer's willingness to negotiate on the model you've chosen



**Arm yourself with the New Car Price Report.
Save Time. Save Money.**

**ConsumerReports®
New Car Price Service**



Call Now For Your \$14 Report.
\$12 for each additional report ordered at the same time.

1-800-651-4636

Or go to www.ConsumerReports.org/cr/BigSavings514

For service in Canada, go to: www.ConsumerReports.org/49canada

PE44CURVES1

Canada Extra

Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

In this special section

Portable air conditioners	32A
Washers	32B
Dryers	32B
Recalls	32C
Autos	32D
Contact info	32D

How to use the Canada Extra section



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

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

In most cases, the prices we list here

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

We appreciate your support, but we don't take it for granted. Please write to CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org 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.

Portable air conditioners Report and Ratings, page 45

Seven of the eight tested portable A/Cs are available.

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rank			0 100 P F G VG E

A (5,000 TO 8,500 BTU/HR.)

1	Frigidaire CRA053PU1	\$350	28
2	Haier HPY08XCM	NA	27

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rank			0 100 P F G VG E

B (9,000 TO 15,500 BTU/HR.)

1	Honeywell MM14CCS	\$680	49
2	Honeywell MN10CESWW	480	48
4	Frigidaire CPA123DU1	530	44
5	Haier HPF12XHM	NA	43
6	Haier HPD10XCM-TC	NA	26

Washers

Report, page 36; Ratings, page 38

Twenty-nine of the 122 tested washers are available, including seven of the recommended models.

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rec.	Rank			0100 P F G VG E

A FRONT-LOADERS

✓	3	Maytag Maxima XL MHW8000AG	\$1,400	82
✓	4	LG WM8000H[V]A ①	1,500	80
✓	5	Samsung WF457ARGS[GR]	1,600	80
✓	6	Samsung WF56H9100AG	1,600	80
	7	Maytag Maxima XL MHW6000AW ①	1,200	79
	9	Whirlpool Duet WFW88HEAW	1,200	78
	10	LG WM3070H[W]A	1,200	78
	11	LG WM3470H[W]A	1,300	78
	13	Samsung WF435ATGJ[WR]	1,300	77
	15	Whirlpool Duet WFW86HEBC	1,100	77
	16	Whirlpool Duet WFW70HEBW	900	77
	18	Maytag Maxima X MHW4200BW	1,000	77
	19	Whirlpool Duet WFW96HEA[W]	1,400	76
	20	Whirlpool Duet WFW94HEX[W]	1,200	76

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rec.	Rank			0100 P F G VG E

B TOP-LOADERS All are high-efficiency models and do not have a center agitator.

✓	1	LG WT5680HVA	\$1,250	73
✓	3	LG WT1701CV	1,200	72
✓	5	Samsung WA422PRHD[WR]	900	72
	6	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB725BW	850	70
	8	LG WT5070C[W]	1,100	70
	9	Maytag Bravos XL MVWB980BW ①	1,000	69
	10	Samsung WA50F9A8DSP	1,200	69
	12	LG WT1101CW	850	67
	13	Samsung WA456DRHD[WR]	1,000	67
	14	Samsung WA50F9A6DSW	1,100	67
	15	Samsung WA400PJHD[WR]	800	68
	16	Samsung WA56H9000AP ①	1,500	68
	17	GE GTAN8250DWS	1,150	68
	18	Whirlpool Cabrio WTW8900BW	1,000	67
	20	Whirlpool Cabrio WTW5800BW ①	750	65

① Wider than most other washers.

Dryers

Report, page 36; Ratings, page 39

Twelve of the 100 tested dryers are available, including three of the recommended models.

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rec.	Rank			0100 P F G VG E

✓	1	Samsung DV56H9100EG ②	\$1,600	86
✓	2	Samsung DV56H9000EP ②	1,500	84
✓	5	Samsung DV50F9A8EVP	1,200	80
	6	LG DLEX3250W	850	79
	7	LG DLEY1701V	1,200	79
	10	Whirlpool Cabrio WED5800BW	750	77

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rec.	Rank			0100 P F G VG E

	11	Maytag Maxima XL YMED8000AG	\$1,400	77
	13	LG DLEX3470[W]	1,300	76
	14	LG DLEX5680V	1,250	76
	16	Samsung DV456EWH[WR]	1,000	76
	17	Whirlpool Duet YWED96HEAW	1,400	76
	19	Maytag Bravos X YMEDX700AG	900	76

② Wider than most other dryers.

Recalls

2011-2012 Chrysler models

The seatbelt wiring harnesses were assembled with incorrectly sized electrical terminal crimps that may cause sporadic illumination of the air-bag warning light. As a result, the air bag may not deploy in a crash, increasing the risk of injury.

Models 7,010 Chrysler 300, Dodge Challenger, and Dodge Charger vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace driver- and passenger-seat air-bag harnesses.

2011-2012 Chrysler models

The power distribution center bus bar may overheat, causing a failure of the antilock brake system (ABS) and electronic stability control (ESC). The loss of function may result in a crash.

Models 8,274 Chrysler 300 and Dodge Charger vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer relocate the ABS/ESC system fuse within the power distribution center.

2011-2012 Ford models

The transmission range sensor may have been incorrectly manufactured. If the shift lever is in the Reverse (R) position, the signal may not be transmitted for R illumination and/or backup lamp activation. If the backup lamps fail to illuminate, the intention to reverse may not be conveyed to others, posing a risk of injury.

Models 1,125 Ford Expedition, Ford F150, Ford Mustang, and Lincoln Navigator vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace the transmission range sensor.

2012 Ford Focus

During assembly, the seal plug may have been dislodged from the wiring harness connector on the passenger-side wiper. Contaminants may enter and accumulate in the connector, causing the wiper to become inoperable.

Models 19,062 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer clean, inspect, and properly seal the passenger-side wiper connector. Inoperative wiper motors will be replaced.

2011-2012 General Motors models

When there is snow and ice buildup, the windshield wiper movement can be restricted. The wiper arm nut may loosen and become inoperable.

Models 5,810 Buick Enclave, Chevrolet Traverse, and GMC Acadia vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer tighten the wiper arm nuts.

2001-2003 Honda models

The internal pressure in the front-passenger air bag may be excessive during deployment. That may cause the inflator to rupture or a failure of the air bag to properly deploy, increasing the risk of injury.

Models 107,786 2001-2003 Honda Civic, 2002-2003 Honda CR-V, 2001-2003 Acura EL, and 2002 Honda Odyssey vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace the passenger air-bag inflator.

2013 Hyundai Santa Fe

If moisture and road salt come in contact with the rear parking assist sensors, it may result in an electrical short within the sensor cavity. The sensors may overheat and cause a vehicle fire.

Models 13,711 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace all four sensors for the rear parking assist system.

2007-2012 Kia models

The stop lamp switch may malfunction and cause intermittent operation of the brake lights. If the lights fail to illuminate when the brake pedal is depressed, it may increase the risk of a crash.

Models 106,098 2011 Optima, 2007-2012 Rondo, 2007 Sedona, 2007-2011 Sorento, 2010-2011 Soul, and 2007-2010 Sportage vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace the stop lamp switch.

2013 Nissan models

Sensors within the occupant detection system (ODS) may have been manufactured incorrectly. The system may malfunction, and deployment of the passenger air bag may be permanently suppressed.

Models 7,796 Altima, JX35, Pathfinder, and Sentra vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace the ODS sensors.

2010-2013 Subaru models

The dealer-installed remote engine starter may not function properly. If the fob is dropped, the internal battery may be damaged. As a result, the fob may start or stop the engine without the user pressing the button.

Models 2,813 2012-2013 Impreza, 2010-2013 Legacy, 2010-2013 Outback, and 2013 XV Crosstrek vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace the remote engine starter fob.

Autos

Report and Ratings, pages 51-61

All of the tested vehicles except the Chevrolet SS 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
SUBCOMPACT CARS								
Ford Fiesta	\$11,999-\$24,499	3.2	9.7	4.8	19.7	9.6	5.1	6.8
Chevrolet Spark	11,945-19,045	4.7	13.7	5.5	22.2	10.5	6.0	7.7
Mitsubishi Mirage	12,498-16,598	4.5	12.9	5.2	21.8	8.4	5.0	6.3
SPORTS CARS								
BMW 2 Series	36,000-45,000	2.1	5.4	2.5	15.8	12.7	7.6	9.5
Porsche 911	96,200-148,800	1.7	4.3	2.6	14.2	14.4	7.4	10.1
Chevrolet Corvette	54,845-73,835	2.1	4.5	2.4	14.5	17.4	8.5	11.8
SPORTS SEDAN								
Chevrolet SS	Not sold in Canada	2.3	5.4	2.5	15.4	19.2	10.2	13.6

Contact info

How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

Frigidaire
800-668-4606
frigidaire.ca

GE
888-261-2088
geappliances.ca

Haier
877-337-3639
haier.com

Honeywell
480-353-3020
honeywell.com

LG
888-542-2623
lg.ca

Maytag
800-688-2002
maytag.ca

Samsung
800-726-7864
samsung.ca

Whirlpool
800-807-6777
whirlpoolappliances.ca