



JANUARY 2014 | CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

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**DIGITAL
DOCTOR'S
OFFICE**
5 WAYS IT CAN
HELP YOUR
HEALTH

Choose the Best

Phones & Plans

How to navigate
the maze
& save money

- ▶ Best & worst carriers
- ▶ Get the most value
- ▶ It's easier to switch than you think



PLUS Last-minute gifts Page 19

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**Guaranteed Savings currently not available in all states. See site for details.

Contents

CONSUMER REPORTS JANUARY 2014

Volume 79 No. 1

DIGITAL DOCTOR

Patient portals will be providing more online services this year.

COVER STORY: SMART-PHONE GUIDE



26 | **Best phones and plans**

We help you navigate the maze of options to pick what's right for you.

30 | **How the carriers compare**

More than 58,000 subscribers rate service in 23 metropolitan areas.

32 | **Get the right model for less**

Our exclusive guide to the top phones and the features worth looking for.

Ratings pages 34-35

36 | **7 ways to cut phone costs**

We'll show you easy saving strategies.

36 | **Phone security**

Here are the precautions you need to take.

LAB TESTS

41 | **Coffeemakers**

Electric French-press-style machines offer a new twist.

42 | **Wireless speakers**

How to make your devices really sing.

42 | **Ultra HD TV**

Sometimes it's really difficult to tell the difference.

43 | **Light-duty vacs**

Combination machines offer a new way to clean up.

FEATURES

16 | **The doctor will e-mail you now**

You can improve your health by using new online services from your doctor's office.

19 | **Last-minute gifts**

Get ideas for your holiday shopping with more than two dozen recommendations.

24 | **LED lightbulbs**

Latest technology offers more choices and lower costs.



44 | **Paper towels**

The best and worst from our tough tests.

Ratings page 45

46 | **Refrigerators**

New models can be both spacious and space-saving.

Ratings pages 47-48

**PLUS
THE
HOT LIST**
Top products in
six categories.
Page 39

Continued on next page

DEPARTMENTS

5 | Ask our experts

5 | Letters

6 | Viewpoint

Make switching banks easier.

6 | From our president

It's truly an honor.

7 | Up front

- AA batteries that shine.
- Food fake-out.
- Wire weary? Consider a charging pad for your phone.
- Antibiotics for a sore throat?
- **CLAIM CHECK** Rust-Oleum NeverWet.
- How to save on car rentals.
- Buying soup? Use your noodle.

13 | Money

Financial resolutions that are worth keeping.



14 | Safety alerts

61 | About us

62 | Index

63 | Selling it

This issue by the numbers

What's the score?

99 Owner satisfaction for Tesla Model S



30 Family Values paper towels

Savings this issue

\$1,300 Buy a Kenmore 7160 **French-door bottom-freezer** for \$1,700 instead of an LG LFX28991 and save this much.

\$84 Pass on insurance and you can save this much on your **cell-phone service** in a year.

\$16 Avoid getting your **car rental** at an airport site and you could save this much, our reporter found.

Coming in February

Ellipticals, treadmills, and other fitness equipment; time-saving kitchen appliances, including ranges and cooktops; advice on whether to repair or replace electronics and appliances; and boxed chocolates.

CARS

49 | News

Fixing flats with aerosol sealants or compressor kits.

50 | Would you buy your car again?

Owners rate the most and least satisfying cars.

52 | Compact sedans

The Toyota Corolla vs. Volkswagen Jetta.

56 | Sporty hatchbacks

The Fiat 500 Abarth vs. Ford Fiesta ST.

58 | Auto Test Extra

Road test of the Mercedes-Benz GLK350.



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Who we are

Consumer Reports

is the world's largest independent consumer-product-testing organization. We also survey millions of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We're based in Yonkers, N.Y., and are a nonprofit organization.

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

How to reach us Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057, attn: Customer Service.
• To send a letter to the editor, go to ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.
• For news tips and story ideas, go to ConsumerReports.org/tips.
• E-mail submissions for Selling It to SellingIt@cro.consumer.org.
• For 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

✓ CR Best Buy Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price.

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

✓ Recommended car These tested well, are reliable, and performed adequately if crash-tested or included in a federal rollover test.

✗ Don't Buy We label products with this icon when we judge them to be safety risks or to have serious performance problems.

ON YOUR MIND

Try a local bank

I was disappointed that "Dump Your Big Bank and Save" (November 2013) did not mention community banks. There are more than 7,000 community banks nationwide that offer services such as free checking accounts with mobile banking and deposit, text alerts, convenient ATMs, and the ability to call the customer-service rep in your branch directly. To find one near your home, go to banklocally.org.

—Alan Gay Scottsboro, AL



Odd couple

I just loved that you paired bacon and activity monitors on the same page (Up Front, November 2013). Made me laugh!

—Karen Zack Menlo Park, CA

Health care for veterans

"It's Showtime for Health Care Reform" (November 2013) was excellent. However, there was a lack of information for veterans. Although by now most vets probably know there will be no change for them, they should

be told the "penalty" for not purchasing health care from the national program does not apply to them or to Veterans Affairs medical patrons.

—Ron Kay Sacramento, CA

Correction The November "Best of the Year" had incorrect overall scores for the Aprilaire Communicating Touchscreen 8800 and the Lux model TX9600TS thermostats. The correct scores are 78 and 75, respectively.

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO
ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.

Ask our experts

Q You list Google Chromecast as one of the "Best of the Year" (November 2013). Are you concerned about privacy with a product that requires users to log on to google.com and provide the name and password for their home wireless network? Does this mean that the next time Google's Street View camera cars drive by that they can legally capture Wi-Fi traffic because the user has voluntarily provided that information?

—Joe Story Silver Spring, MD

Personal information you give to any service provider is only as secure as that provider's integrity, plus its willingness and ability to protect your information. Any Wi-Fi-connected device that uses a service provider, such as your smart phone or set-top box, also stores your login information and could even "back it up" to the carrier's server if allowed. In this particular case, Google's privacy policy would prohibit its staff from logging directly on to your Wi-Fi network. But Google staffers (and anyone else, for that matter) could "troll" your neighborhood for the names of peoples' Wi-Fi networks and log their location.

Google says that it doesn't collect Wi-Fi information with the Street View vehicles. Instead, it says it does it by gathering data in the background from smart-phone users who have Wi-Fi and GPS turned on and have agreed to share received location data with Google. To render your Wi-Fi anonymous to such trolling, you can choose to turn off "SSID broadcast" in your router settings. Your Wi-Fi router's name will then show up as blank in any search, and you'll have to remember it and give it to any guest (or new device, such as Chromecast) that needs access. If you just want to drop it from Google's location service, add "_nomap" to the end of the existing name.



CHROMECAST PRIVACY To protect yourself, it's easy to change your router's Wi-Fi settings.

Q I just opened my battery-operated alarm clock and found a badly corroded AA battery. Even though the date on the battery said MAR 2014, it was covered in white crystals. Are those crystals dangerous to touch?

—Alex Newberry Sarasota, FL

As batteries discharge—either through usage or gradual self-discharge—the chemistry of the cells changes and some hydrogen gas is generated. That increases pressure in the battery, which either ruptures the insulating seals at the end of the battery or the outer metal canister, or both. In addition, as the

battery ages, its steel outer canister may gradually corrode or rust.

Alkaline batteries are prone to leaking potassium hydroxide, a caustic agent that can cause respiratory, eye, and skin irritations. You can reduce the risks by not mixing battery types in the same device, and by replacing all of the batteries at the same time. You should store them in a dry place and avoid extremely high temperatures. As another measure, you should remove the batteries when you store the device.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO
ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts.

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

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Truly an honor

At the end of February I'll be retiring after 13 years as president of Consumer Reports. Before that I served on the board of directors for 22 years. Three decades of service to this treasured American institution and the consumers we serve has been the thrill of a lifetime.



I know "thrill" may seem like a strange word for something as serious as testing and rating thousands of products every year, evaluating services, distributing our findings and buying advice to millions of consumers, and advocating for consumer rights in Washington, D.C., and state capitals across the country. But it's immensely satisfying and fulfilling to be the head of one of the few institutions in the U.S. that you can trust to be unbiased, free of commercial influence, honest about findings, and totally on your side—watching your back in a complex and sometimes dangerous marketplace.

As I drive to work each day, I almost always feel a sense of energy and excitement knowing that I'll be surrounded by a staff of smart, creative, mission-driven people finding innovative ways to give consumers more control over their lives.

I love being at an organization that is beholden to no one but the consumer. I love that Consumer Reports helps millions be stronger and smarter consumers, and make better, more confident choices. And I love working for an organization that is values-driven: dedicated, courageous, engaged, caring—and expert—in everything we do.

For many years, the founding chair of Consumer Reports was a professor of economics at Amherst College in Massachusetts, Colston Warne. By coincidence, when I was a young boy growing up in the town of Amherst, I was Colston's paperboy. Back then, I didn't know Consumer Reports, but now, more than half a century later, I've had the good fortune to run this amazing organization that he helped establish.

We all know that life unfolds in unpredictable ways. I'm thankful that mine brought me to Consumer Reports. In my final column next month, I'll share with you my thoughts and hopes for the future of this dynamic institution that you and I so highly treasure.

Jim Guest
JIM GUEST
President

WHERE WE STAND

Switching banks

THE ISSUE Moving automatic bill payments and direct deposits to a new bank is a needlessly complicated, confusing process that can drag on for months. Closing a bank account can bring other obstacles, including unfair fees.

OUR TAKE You shouldn't feel trapped at your bank. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., have sponsored new legislation in Congress to change that. The Freedom and Mobility in Consumer Banking Act, endorsed by Consumers Union, includes a number of reforms that will make it simpler for consumers to switch banks. They include prohibiting fees for closing accounts and



requiring banks to provide clear closing procedures and assistance in rerouting direct deposits and bill payments.

The new legislation will also improve competition and consumer choice within the banking system. Contact your lawmakers at senate.gov and house.gov to urge them to pass the bill. For our advice on moving your money to a new checking account, go to DefendYourDollars.org.

830

That's the number of confirmed influenza-related deaths in children between 2004 and 2012, according to a new report in the journal *Pediatrics*. Death often occurred within three days of the flu's onset. More than a third died before being admitted to a hospital. Flu season historically peaks in February, so there's still time to get your children (and yourself) vaccinated.

ON THE RECORD

'Raw poultry is not a ready-to-eat product.'

—RON FOSTER, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF FOSTER FARMS *Chicken from three of his company's processing plants sickened more than 360 people in 21 states. The poultry was contaminated with dangerous strains of salmonella. Foster Farms never issued a recall, but the company said it implemented some safety procedures. We recommend avoiding raw chicken labeled with plant codes P-6137, P-6137A, or P-7632.*

TAKING ACTION

Consumers Union joins lawsuit on car safety

Backing up a car can be a lethal maneuver. Two hundred pedestrians are struck and killed each year in "backup" crashes and more than 18,000 are injured. Almost half of the fatalities involve children younger than 5. That's because even if drivers use all three of their

car's mirrors, a blind spot several feet high often exists directly behind the vehicle.

Five years ago, Congress passed a law that directed the Department of Transportation to issue a rule for automakers that would improve rear-view visibility. The new rule, expected to make backup cameras a standard feature, was to go into effect in 2011.

The DOT has postponed the rule four times, most recently pushing it back to 2015. As a result, Consumers Union has joined safety advocates in filing a federal lawsuit against the agency to stop the delays and force the rule to be implemented. Rear-view cameras can prevent backup crashes and save lives, but many cars still don't have them. The time for action is long overdue. A court date is pending.



Up front



AA batteries that shine

Is anyone giving or receiving a holiday gift labeled “batteries not included”? We thought so. Listen up: We tested 15 AA batteries—the type typically used in digital cameras, flashlights, toys, radios, and remote controls—and found differences in performance and cost. (Note that the batteries aren’t rechargeable. In past tests we’ve found that rechargeables of 2,000

milliamp-hours or more are best for often-used devices such as game controllers.)

What we found. Overall, the tested lithium batteries performed much better than the alkalines, especially in cameras, which tend to drain a charge quickly. But alkalines cost far less, and some perform almost as well as lithiums in low-drain devices such as flashlights and remotes.

In our camera test, which mimics everyday use (zooming, flashing, shooting, and resting until batteries die), top-rated Energizer Ultimate lithium took 609 shots; the best of the alkalines, Duracell Quantum, 76 shots; and the lowest-rated alkaline, Toys “R” Us, just 49 shots.

Our flashlight test involves the equivalent of turning a flashlight on for 4 minutes every hour for 8 hours, letting it sit for 16 hours, and repeating the cycle until the batteries die. Battery life was 7.3 hours for the Energizer Ultimate lithium, 6.8 hours for the Duracell Quantum, and 4 hours for the Toys “R” Us alkaline.

Bottom line. Energizer Ultimate lithium, \$5.50 per pair, was the clear winner. Among alkaline batteries, consider Duracell Quantum, Duracell Ultra Power, or, for less money, Kirkland Signature—although you’ll have to buy those batteries 48 at a time. Once dead, alkaline and lithium batteries can generally be tossed in the trash. For info about recycling rechargeables, go to call2recycle.org.

Ratings

All tested products

In performance order.

CR Best Buy
Recommended

● Excellent
● Very good
● Good
● Fair
● Poor

Rec.	Product	Cost ¹	Overall score	Test results	
			0 100 P F G V E	Camera	Flashlight
LITHIUM					
✓	Energizer Ultimate	\$5.50	90	●	●
	Energizer Advanced	5.00	77	●	●
ALKALINE					
✓	Duracell Quantum	2.25	57	●	●
✓	Duracell Ultra Power	2.00	55	●	●
✓	Kirkland Signature (Costco)	0.50 ²	52	●	●
✓	Panasonic Evolta	2.25	52	●	●
✓	Duracell Coppertop	2.25	51	●	●
✓	Rayovac Advanced	1.65	51	●	●
	CVS Max	1.75	50	●	○
	Rayovac Ready Power	0.75	50	●	●
	Walgreens Supercell	1.25	46	●	○
	Energizer Max	2.00	46	●	○
	Amazon Basics Alkaline	0.75	44	●	○
	Eveready Gold	1.00	41	●	○
	Toys “R” Us Ultra	0.65	28	●	○

¹ Per pair. ² Sold only in a pack of 48.



■ DID YOU KNOW?

The claim game

Longevity claims often refer to storage life—10 years is a common promise—not usage. Cited comparisons can be self-defeating if they refer to a battery in the same brand. Eveready Gold, for example, “lasts 3X longer than Eveready Super Heavy Duty carbon zinc in toys and games.”

Food fake-out

Have you ever bought something “buttery” only to find that it contains no butter? How about a product with fruit pictured on the label but no fruit inside? These days, you’ll find bacon bits without bacon, blueberry cereal without blueberries, and cream-filled cookies without anything from a cow.

A local shopping expedition and our Facebook fans turned up these examples. We asked companies to explain the connections, but most either didn’t respond or were vague.

► **McCormick Bac’n Pieces.** Bac’n bits have no meat. They’re a blend of soy flour, canola oil, salt, caramel color, maltodextrin (a thickener or filler), natural and artificial flavors, lactic acid, yeast extract, disodium inosinate and disodium guanylate (flavor enhancers), and red food dye. On the other hand, they are cholesterol-free.

► **International Delight Gourmet Coffee Creamer.** “The taste of melted ice cream (from Cold Stone Creamery) in your coffee?” the label teases. “Pour it on, buckle up and blast off to the sweet ‘n creamy stratosphere.” If you’re expecting a dollop of melted ice cream, you’re in for a hard landing. The Food and Drug Administration insists that real ice cream contain at least 10 percent milk fat. This creamer is mostly water, sugar, and palm oil.

► **Tang.** The label shows a juicy orange, but the powdered breakfast drink is mostly sugar, fructose, and citric acid (for tartness). It contains less than 2 percent “natural” flavor. The neon orange coloring? It comes from food dyes Yellow No. 5 and No. 6.



► **Wise Onion Rings.** “Relish real, robust onion ring flavor!” the label says. But these rings bear little resemblance to batter-dipped, deep-fried onion slices. The top three (of 17) ingredients: corn starch, tapioca starch, and vegetable oil. There are also four food colorings, one of them blue. As for real onions, a company rep said there aren’t any. These are onion-flavored rings, she noted, with a seasoning that includes garlic powder, paprika, and onion powder. It’s applied to the rings after they’re cooked.

► **Tropical Pizza Topping.** It looks and shreds like mozzarella. But real mozzarella must have at least 45 percent milk fat by weight of its solid ingredients and is made using a simple milk-and-rennet mixture. The imitation has about 20 ingredients, starting with water and partially hydrogenated soybean oil and including powdered cellulose to prevent caking. Casein, a milk protein, is the only dairylike ingredient.

► **Kellogg’s Frosted Mini Wheats Blueberry.** The box pictures blueberries, but the ingredients show no evidence of actual fruit. They include whole-grain wheat, sugar, corn ... and red and blue food coloring. A Kellogg’s consumer affairs specialist acknowledged the lack of blueberries, saying the cereal gets its flavor from a “confidential and proprietary” blend of natural and artificial flavors. Under FDA labeling rules, the company doesn’t have to be any more specific than that.

Wire-weary? Consider a charging pad for your phone



DURACELL POWERMAT
The pad is plugged in, but the phone charges wirelessly.

If you’re tired of dealing with the spaghetti of wires required to recharge electronic devices, you might try a wireless charging pad for your cell phone. Put the phone on the pad, which is kept plugged into a socket, and charging occurs through a technology called inductive coupling.

We tested four pads. The Duracell works only with iPhones, which lack built-in wireless-charging capability. To enable charging, you’ll need to equip the phone with a case or back, about \$25 to \$50. The other pads use Qi technology, which is incompatible with iPhones but works with other brands. Phones that aren’t already Qi compatible will need a wireless case or back.

Bottom line. The pads are most handy for owners of phones that have wireless-charging capability built in.

► Duracell Powermat, \$70

It can charge up to three phones at a time. It lets you know when a phone is in the proper position for recharging, and it charges as fast as an AC adapter.

► Energizer Inductive Charger, \$75

It can charge up to three phones at a time—two wirelessly on the pad and one wired via a USB port. Charge times are about an hour longer than with an AC adapter.



▶ **Nabisco Oreos.** That white filling lacks milk, butter, eggs, or any other dairy component. (When we asked a Kraft customer-service rep what makes the filling smooth and creamy, she told us the answer was a trade secret.) Oreos have about a dozen ingredients, starting with sugar, flour, various vegetable oils, high-fructose corn syrup, and cocoa. Chocolate is the last ingredient.

▶ **Mrs. Butterworth's Original Syrup.** There's neither butter nor maple syrup in this topping, though a representative from Pinnacle Foods said that Mrs. Butterworth's did include 2 percent real butter in the 1970s. Today's version lists high-fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, water, salt, cellulose gum (a thickener), and molasses before a generic reference to "natural and artificial" flavor.

Bottom line. Many commercially prepared products are loaded with the stuff of chemistry class and tend to be high in calories from added sugars. Our advice:

- Look past pretty pictures and tasty names. Photos of fruit and words such as "butter" may convey a false impression of what's inside. The truth is on the label. The FDA requires that ingredients be listed in descending order by weight.

- Compare labels. Some processed foods have more extras than others. In addition to milk and cream, Kraft Simply Cottage Cheese includes whey; salt; modified food starch; guar, xanthan, and carob bean gums; and carageenan. Daisy Cottage Cheese, on the other hand, has three ingredients: skim milk, cream, and salt.

- Beware of buzzwords. There's a reason companies use "bac'n" instead of bacon: It's not the real deal. Potato "crisps" such as Lay's can't be "chips" because the FDA requires a chip to be thinly sliced potato fried in deep fat, not something fabricated from dried potatoes with cornstarch, sugar, and soy lecithin.

Antibiotics for a sore throat?

According to a new study published in JAMA Internal Medicine, at about 60 percent of office visits that are due to a sore throat, patients get a prescription for an antibiotic. But sore throats, colds, and sinus infections rarely respond to antibiotics. Most of those ailments are caused by a virus, and antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses. What's more, overprescription of antibiotics can lead bugs to become resistant to common drugs, making the drugs less effective when you really need them.

Before you start begging your doc for a Z-Pak (azithromycin) when you have the sniffles, here's how to tell when your sore throat should respond to antibiotics and when it probably won't.



Strep throat. Throat soreness that starts quickly, severe pain when swallowing, fever of 101° F or higher, red and swollen tonsils, tiny red spots at the back of the mouth's roof, headache, nausea or vomiting, swollen lymph nodes in the neck. Your doctor should confirm the diagnosis with a throat swab. Consider antibiotics if confirmed.

Common sore throat. Sneezing, cough, watery eyes, mild headache and body aches, runny nose, low-grade fever. Gargle with salt water, suck on ice chips, try OTC lozenges or pain relievers.

Keep it clean. To avoid getting strep throat or a virus, wash your hands often and don't share eating utensils. If you're washing with soap and water, lather, scrub, and rub for at least 20 seconds (hum the "Happy Birthday" song twice). If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that's at least 60 percent alcohol.

CLAIM CHECK

Rustoleum NeverWet

The claim. "Imagine a surface being rained on but never wet, spilled on but never wet, submerged but never wet," says an ad for Rustoleum NeverWet, which "causes liquids to form perfect spheres so they roll off surfaces like never before." It's designed to repel moisture on everything from cloth to concrete. You spray on a base coat, let it dry for a half-hour, then spray on a top coat and wait at least another half-hour before exposing the treated item to water.

The check. We used NeverWet on work gloves made of cloth and leather and on sneakers, boots, steel, wood, aluminum, glass, plastic, paper, paving stones, and cloth



seat cushions. Our tester confesses that his "inner geek really wanted this product to work well."

Bottom line. Call it SoonWet. The coating worked—water ran right off—but not for long in the real world, where life is a contact sport. As the instructions note, there are limitations. Rubbing a treated surface with a finger

was enough to stop the coating from shedding water. It has poor adhesion and some opacity on plastic and glass, as noted in the instructions, and dries to a frosted color. It also has difficulty covering rough surfaces, and it gives off vapors when applied.

▶ LG Nexus 4 Wireless Charging Orb WCP-400, \$60

It can charge just one phone at a time. It's easy to end charging by mistake if you touch the phone, which must be placed precisely. Charging takes about an hour longer than with an AC adapter.

▶ Panasonic ChargePad QE-TM101-K, \$60

Put one or two phones anywhere on the pad, which charges a second phone automatically after the first is done. Charging takes about an hour longer than with an AC adapter.

How to save on car rentals

How does a \$69 car rental end up costing more than \$200? Easy. The advertised rate is just the beginning.

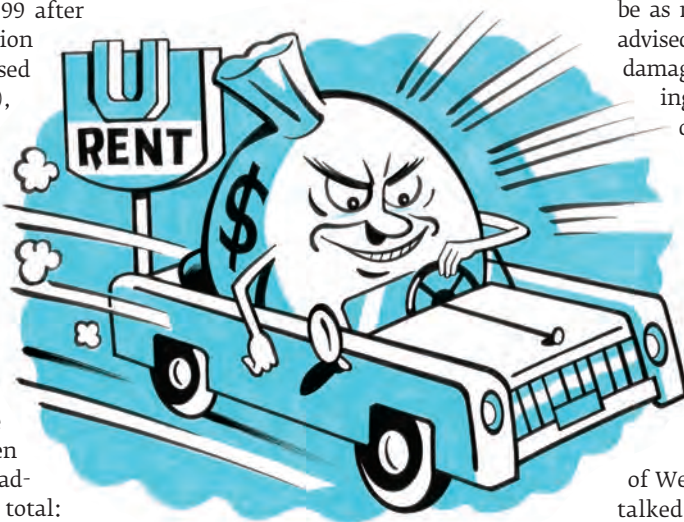
Reporter Tod Marks, who covers shopping for CONSUMER REPORTS as Tightwad Tod, tried booking a Hertz economy car for two days in Charlotte, N.C. His best rate: \$69. That jumped to \$99 after four layers of taxes, concession and facility surcharges (imposed when renting at an airport), and a fee to recoup the cost of plates and registration.

Next came a pitch for other extras: a waiver to relieve Marks of responsibility for damage, theft, and loss of vehicle use, \$58 for two days, supplemental liability insurance, \$28, personal accident insurance/effects coverage to pay some medical bills and replace stolen items, \$14, and emergency roadside assistance, \$10. The new total: \$209. Another decision: whether to prepay for a fill-up, to avoid looking for a gas station before returning the car. That makes sense for a long trip but not for anything less.

How do you keep the bill from going through the sunroof? We asked experts for tips and invited CONSUMER REPORTS Facebook fans to share lessons from past rentals. The first rule: Plan ahead to avoid making decisions under pressure at the rental counter. Other advice:

Shop early. Compare rates at rental-car websites and at Expedia, Hotwire, and TripAdvisor. Airlines may offer a fly-and-drive discount, though in our experience it's not steep. AAA, AARP, and Costco dangle deals, too. Marks scored his \$69 rate by

using AAA, which offered extra savings through a promo code. Other rates for the same rental were as high as \$109. AAA also offers member discounts on extras such as GPS navigation, and it waives the second-driver fee. Most reservations don't require prepayment, so you can book and



cancel if you find a better deal. Weigh that against "pay now" discounts—up to 35 percent for Budget customers, for instance.

Contact your insurer. You may be adequately covered through your auto policy, says Jeanne Salvatore, senior vice president of the Insurance Information Institute. Check on collision and comprehensive coverage, and be sure you're protected for the "full value" of a loss, plus "loss of use," to offset revenue lost while a car is out of service. If there are coverage gaps, consider loss (or collision) coverage. It won't protect you if you're negligent but can keep an accident from going on your insurance record. A homeowners policy usually covers theft of personal items from a rental car.

Check your credit card. Some cards automatically provide secondary coverage for collision damage, after you've paid the deductible. For \$25 per rental of up to 42 days, American Express offers more extensive protection (theft, damage, medical, no deductibles), and the insurance is primary—you needn't notify your insurer.

Steer clear of airports. Marks' rental cost rose by \$16 simply because the site was on airport property, where there are additional mandatory fees.

Examine the car. "Inspect the car in a bright-light zone before leaving the lot and be as nitpicking as the rental company," advised a Facebook fan who had to pay for a damaged wheel he failed to see before driving off a dark lot. Note damage on the contract, and have it signed before driving off. Take photos.

Avoid penalties. Facebook posters reported penalties for canceling a reservation without ample notice, for returning a car more than a half-hour late or a few hours early, and for returning it to a different site. If the car smells of tobacco smoke, you could face a \$250 cleaning fee.

Skip accessories. Wolf German of Westbury, N.Y., a Facebook fan, was talked into taking a Sunpass transponder (like an E-ZPass) to avoid toll plaza bottlenecks when visiting Disney World. All told, he spent \$4 on tolls and \$34 on the transponder fees.

▣ CLOSE-UP

The advertised rate is just the beginning, says travel industry expert Bill McGee: "The rental-car industry has begun charging for everything but the steering wheel." Below, a few of the extras for which our reporter could have been charged. Fees are per day.

Satellite radio: \$5

GPS navigator: \$13

PlatePass transponder to zip through toll plazas (the actual tolls are extra): \$5

Child safety seat: \$11

Second driver allowed: \$13

Tell us about your ancient electronic device

For an upcoming report on vintage electronics, we'd like to hear about any very old TV set, computer, phone, stereo equipment, or gaming device you have that is still in working order. Send a description of the item, information on how to reach you, and (if possible) a photo of you with the item to TellCR@CRO.Consumer.org.





GOT 15 MINUTES? You could prepare this soup, which tasted far better than the tested products.

Buying soup? Use your noodle

Chicken noodle soup sounds like a good idea on a bad day, but check our Ratings before you buy. None of the 11 tested soups is very good, and Pacific Natural, the priciest one at \$1.63 per cup, tastes worst of all. (Its seasoning overwhelms the broth, and the pasta and vegetables are mushy.)

The other tested soups cost as little as 26 cents per serving, but each has something that keeps it from being very good: a taste of bouillon cube rather than real chicken stock; dry, spongy, or chewy chicken; or mushy pasta or vegetables. Bear Creek has firm noodles and tasty vegetables but salty, overseasoned broth; Campbell's Homestyle has good broth but mushy carrots; Lipton has

lots of noodles but just a few dry chicken bits.

These soups score fair to good for nutrition based on calories, fat, sodium, and other factors. Calories range from 60 to 120 per cup of prepared soup; sodium, from 410 to 940 milligrams (940 milligrams is almost half of the recommended daily limit for most people). Progresso Light tastes almost identical to Progresso Traditional, but that's not surprising: They differ by only 30 calories and 1 gram of fat, and sodium content is the same for both.

Bottom line. Homemade soup or freshly made soup from a supermarket would taste far better than these. If convenience is key, read the Ratings before buying.

Ratings

All tested products In taste order.

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Product	Type	Nutrition	Per cup, prepared				Comments
			Cost	Calories	Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	
GOOD							
Bear Creek Country Kitchens	dry mix	○	\$0.43	120	2	650	Lots of large, firm noodles with flavorful peas, corn, carrot slices in salty broth.
Campbell's Homestyle	condensed	◐	0.64	70	2	940	Narrow noodles in tasty broth, but mushy carrots with little flavor.
Lipton Soup Secrets	dry mix	○	0.28	70	1	680	Simple broth with lots of short, thin noodles and a few dry chicken bits.
Campbell's	condensed	◐	0.32	60	2	890	Good chicken flavor, slight fatty mouth feel, no vegetables, slightly mushy noodles.
Progresso Light	ready	○	0.95	70	1.5	690	Big, mushy vegetables. Dry chicken chunks. Spiral pasta, vegetable taste in broth.
Progresso Traditional	ready	○	1.10	100	2.5	690	A lot like Progresso Light.
Campbell's Chunky Healthy Request	ready	○	1.25	110	2.5	410	Dry, chewy chicken chunks, carrots, pasta spirals, vegetable taste in broth.
Great Value (Walmart)	condensed	◐	0.26	70	2	890	Mushy pasta, spongy chicken, an off-taste.
Market Pantry (Target)	condensed	◐	0.28	70	2	900	Soft pasta, spongy chicken, an off-taste.
365 Everyday Value Organic (Whole Foods)	ready	◐	1.35	100	1.5	650	Pasta and vegetables are mushy, with little flavor; chicken chunks have off-taste.
FAIR							
Pacific Natural Foods Organic	ready	○	1.63	90	1.5	710	Rosemary and poultry seasoning overwhelms slightly bitter broth. Vegetables and spiral pasta are mushy.

OUR RECIPE

Making it yourself

With 15 minutes of prep time (an hour of total cooking), you can create a far better soup than any we tested. You can change our recipe easily, adding carrots, substituting chopped onions for shallots, or using rice instead of egg noodles. Yield: about 6½ cups.

Ingredients

- 1 chicken breast half, bone in, with skin (about ¾ lb.)
- ¼ cup finely chopped shallots
- 4 cups water
- 2½ cups ready-to-serve chicken broth or stock (Knorr Homestyle Stock gel was very good in our recent tests)
- ½ cup finely diced celery
- 1¼ tsp. salt
- ⅛ tsp. marjoram
- ⅛ tsp. thyme
- 3 oz. egg noodles, uncooked
- Pinch black pepper

Place chicken skin side down in preheated 3-quart saucepan; brown over medium heat for about 5 minutes. Remove chicken, reduce heat to low, add shallots, stir a minute or two. Don't brown. Return chicken to pan, add remaining ingredients except for noodles, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low-simmer, leave pan uncovered, cook 30 minutes or until chicken is tender. Remove chicken. Cool. Discard bones and skin. Dice chicken and return it to pan. (Soup can be refrigerated at this point.) Just before serving, return soup to a boil. Add noodles and cook until they're done.



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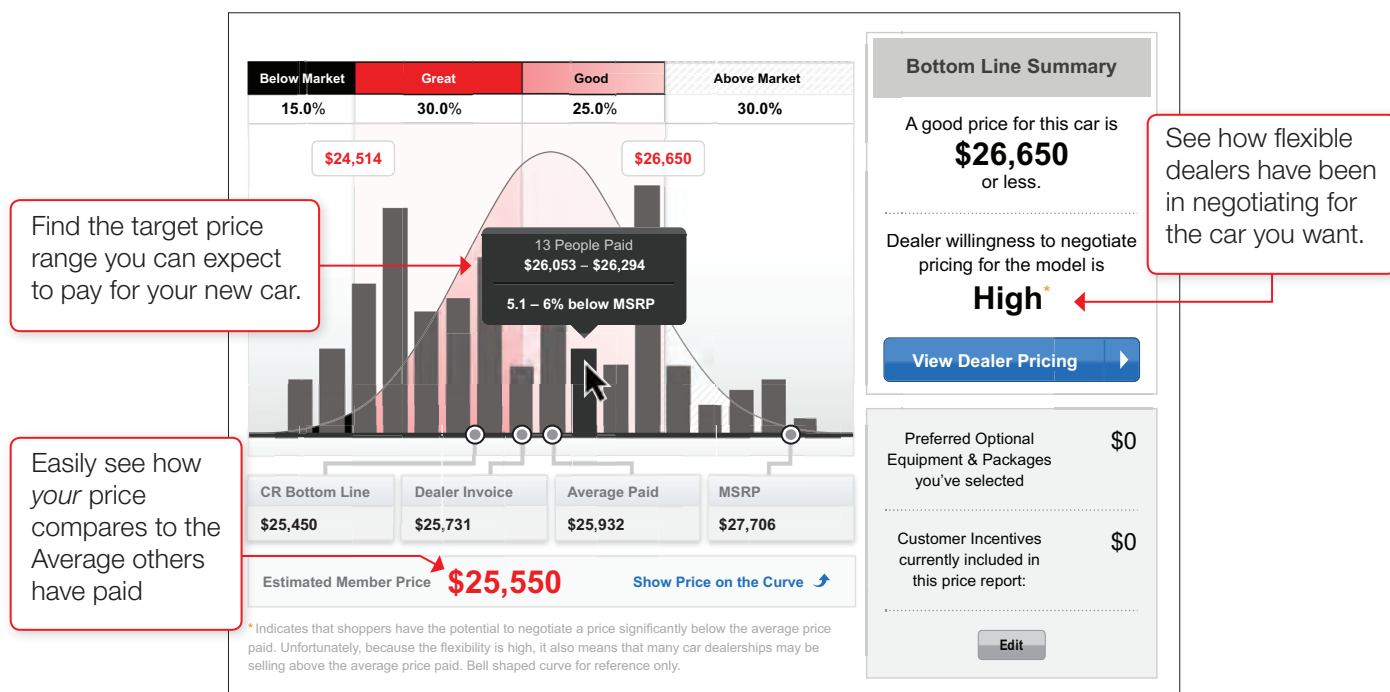
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Financial resolutions worth keeping

New Year's resolutions typically involve losing weight, but here's another idea: Why not plan to get your finances into shape, too?

Almost half of those who set financial resolutions such as spending less, paying off debts, and saving more for retirement achieve most of them, a recent Fidelity Investments study found. To set yourself up for success, break down each goal into manageable portions, says Mari Adams, a financial planner in Boca Raton, Fla. Focus first on short-term fixes, then work on longer-term goals to stay on track in the future. You may find that getting your finances in shape this way is a whole lot easier than swearing off french fries.

Reduce your debt

FOR THE SHORT TERM

❑ Wipe out credit-card balances

Most of us carry our debt around the hips, where our wallets bulge with credit cards. American families with revolving credit-card balances owe \$15,149 on average, according to the Federal Reserve Board. "Even good savers can run up big card debt due to unforeseen events," says Michael Garry, a financial planner in Newtown, Pa.

When the CONSUMER REPORTS Money Lab analyzed ways of prioritizing credit-card payments, we found that paying off the one with the highest interest rate first resulted in the least interest paid. To proceed, pay as much as you can on your highest-rate card each month, and the minimum on the others. When the first card is paid off, concentrate on the next-highest interest rate card. Repeat until your credit-card debt is history. To see how the strategy could work for you, go to 360financialliteracy.org/tools/calculators and click on Credit Cards under Topics, then "Roll-Down Your Credit Card Debt!"



FOR THE LONG TERM

❑ Target your mortgage

Eliminating your mortgage by the time you retire is a worthwhile goal, Garry says, because even low-rate loans can be burdensome when you have less income. Although rates have been rising, you may still be able to cut your mortgage debt by refinancing. The rate for 30-year fixed loans was just over 4 percent recently, which means refinancing might be worthwhile if you're paying more than 5 percent, Garry says. HSH.com, which publishes mortgage loan data, has a calculator on its website (at hsh.com/usnrcalc.html) that can help you decide whether refinancing makes sense.

You can also make extra payments toward your loan principal. By doing so, you'll earn a guaranteed return on your investment equal to your mortgage interest rate. If your rate is, say, 5½ percent, you're

better off paying extra on your mortgage than putting the money into a low-yield bank CD. You can use the mortgage prepayment calculator at HSH.com to see how much more you'd have to kick in each month to pay off your mortgage sooner.

Focus on your savings

FOR THE SHORT TERM

❑ Consolidate your accounts

Bringing your accounts together at as few financial institutions as possible has a number of advantages. For starters, you'll have less paperwork to fuss with. And with all of your money in one place, your required minimum distributions from IRAs and the like will be easier to calculate. Your bigger total balances will probably entitle you to reduced fees and more personalized service, too.

If you already do business with a brokerage firm or mutual-fund company that you're happy with, that's probably the best place to start. Call to ask what would be involved in transferring any other stocks, bonds, mutual funds, ETFs, and so forth to that financial institution. Because you're not liquidating the accounts but merely moving them to a new custodian, there should be no tax consequences. If any assets can't be transferred, you can choose to sell them and reinvest the proceeds or continue to keep them separate.

FOR THE LONG TERM

❑ Sock away more for retirement

You might find boosting your retirement savings rate from, say, 7 percent to 15 percent difficult or even impossible. But nudging it up to 9 percent probably isn't, Garry says. And our Money Lab found that the additional savings add up. For example, if a 50-year-old conservative investor who has been saving 7 percent of his salary increased it to 9 percent, at age 67 his nest egg would be at least 10 percent larger.

Putting your extra savings into your 401(k) plan, if you have one, is the best place to start, Adams says. For one thing, the money comes out of your paychecks automatically. Your contributions and the money they earn over time aren't taxed until you begin withdrawals. And many employers still offer some kind of match. In 2013 the amount you can contribute climbed to \$23,000 for those 50 or older; it's now \$17,500 if you're younger than that.

❑ DID YOU KNOW?

A smart way to save more

If you have money left after fully funding your 401(k), you can still contribute to any type of IRA. Set up regular automatic withdrawals from your checking or money-market account. For the 2013 tax year contributions limits rose from \$5,000 to \$5,500 (\$6,500 if you're 50 or older) for either a traditional IRA, where you get a tax break on the money going in, or a Roth IRA, where you forgo an up-front

deduction but get tax-free withdrawals later. Both have eligibility restrictions tied to your income and tax-filing status and, in the case of the traditional IRA, whether you have a retirement plan at work. The traditional IRA has age restrictions (you can't contribute past age 70½); the Roth does not. IRS Publication 590 (at irs.gov) has all of the details.

CPSC considers banning super-magnetic toys

HIGH-POWERED magnetic desk toys have been popular holiday gifts in recent years. But at a public hearing held in fall 2013 by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, several doctors urged not only that consumers avoid those items but also that the magnetic toys be banned from the U.S. market.

The desk toys usually contain more than 200 tiny round or cube-shaped neodymium magnets that are at least 15 times more powerful than standard magnets. They stick together with such force that if

Doctors tell the panel about the dangers they have seen.

a child swallows more than one, they can draw together parts of the gastrointestinal tract, boring holes in the stomach or intestines. That could result in severe, life-threatening complications within hours.

The products are labeled for use by those age 14 and up, and carry warnings about ingestion hazards. But the tiny magnetic balls increasingly have ended up in children's hands and mouths, often causing serious injuries.

The CPSC hearing focused on its proposed new rules. The rules would prohibit the sale of neodymium magnetic ball sets

containing even a single magnet that has a flux index, or magnet strength, of more than 50 and which is small enough to fit within the small-parts cylinder that the CPSC uses to test for choking hazards.

Doctors and consumer advocates also asked the CPSC to ensure that its definition of high-powered magnetic products would encompass jewelry, pens, and other novelty items with such magnets.

"The CPSC's previous actions—including improving warnings, publishing public-service announcements, and recalling of existing products—were necessary and appropriate, but it is clear that additional steps are needed to protect public safety," said Ami Gadhia, senior policy counsel for Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports.

Though 10 U.S. companies already have agreed with the CPSC and stopped selling rare-earth magnetic desk toys, others have not, including Zen Magnets and Star Networks USA, which sells Magnet Cubes. CPSC staff has sued both companies to compel them to stop selling the magnet sets. The agency is also suing Craig Zucker, former CEO of the company that marketed Buckyballs, seeking to get refunds for consumers. Zucker dissolved Maxfield & Ober-ton Holdings after the CPSC filed its suit, leaving him as the only responsible party.

Some magnet importers and other critics have argued that the CPSC's proposed safety standard amounts to government overreach, and they blame parents for



HIGH-POWERED FIGHT Several companies have stopped selling the magnets, but others are balking.

their children's magnet-related injuries. But doctors at the hearing strongly argued that small, super-strong magnets pose a unique and unacceptable risk.

Ian Leibowitz, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at Virginia Commonwealth University, said, "I have taken out hundreds of different foreign bodies in my career, but few pose the morbidity risk of these magnets."

Within the last year alone, there have been at least seven published reports of high-powered magnet ingestions affecting children in the U.S. For example, a recent study based on an analysis of emergency-room data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System estimates that 7,159 emergency-room visits from 2002 through 2011 were attributable to high-powered magnet sets.

RECALLS

AUTOMOBILES

'12-'13 various Toyota models

The drain hose for an air-conditioning condenser may get clogged, causing water to pool at the bottom of the unit housing. The water may then leak onto the air-bag control module and result in a short circuit. That may disable or inadvertently deploy the air bags, which can injure occupants, cause a crash, or fail to deploy in the case of an accident, resulting in serious injury.

MODELS 802,769 Avalon, Avalon HZ, Camry, Camry HV, and Venza vehicles.

WHAT TO DO The dealer will seal the A/C condenser unit housing and install a protective



cover on the air-bag control module. Call Toyota at 800-331-4331 for details.

'13-'14 various Infiniti and Nissan models

During light braking on rough roads, the antilock brake system's software that determines brake pressure may lead to an increase in stopping distance, increasing the risk of a crash.

MODELS 151,695 '13 Infiniti JX35, '14 Infiniti QX60, and '13-'14 Nissan Pathfinder vehicles.

WHAT TO DO The dealer will reprogram the antilock brake system. Drivers can call 800-647-7261 for details.



HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

HeathCo motion-activated outdoor lights

The internal fixture wiring can energize the entire surface and fittings of the fixture, posing a risk of electrical shock.

PRODUCTS About 210,000 Heath/Zenith motion-activated outdoor lights used for porch lighting sold nationwide and online from December 2006 to July 2013 for \$50 to \$120.

WHAT TO DO Turn off the power switch before removing the light from its mounting. Contact HeathCo at 855-704-5438 or go to heath-zenith.com for instructions on how to return the fixture and get a free replacement.



▶ Court hears secret consumer case

A federal appeals court in Richmond, Va., is expected to decide in the next few months whether records should be unsealed in the case of an unnamed company that is challenging a database of consumer-safety complaints.

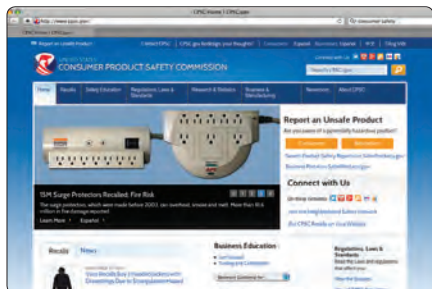
The corporation, known only as "Company Doe," had successfully sued the Consumer Product Safety Commission to prevent it from publicly posting on its SaferProducts.gov database a report about a child who was allegedly harmed by the company's product. The company said the report was inaccurate.

But in the appeals court hearing in late October 2013, several parties objected to the secrecy surrounding the case. Conducting the entire case in secret, allowing a corporation to use a pseudonym, and sealing the court documents to protect a company's reputation and economic interests rather than adhering to a long tradition of open judicial proceedings on matters of public interest were unprecedented and unjustified, argued Scott Michelman, attorney for Public Citizen. The consumer-advocacy group filed the appeal to unseal the Company Doe court documents jointly with the Consumer Federation of America and Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports.

Baruch Fellner, the attorney presenting the argument for Company Doe, stated that the economic interests of Company Doe should take precedence over the public's First Amendment right of access to court records.

Judge Andre M. Davis, who presided over the three-judge panel, asked Fellner whether Company Doe would still object to having the seal lifted on the documents in six months, 18 months, 24 months, 36 months, or even 10 years. Fellner said that the company would still object to unsealing the record.

Other federal agencies also have databases that post safety-related complaints online, such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Commission's SaferCar.gov. "The CPSC's public database clearly is not unprecedented, and it is an important tool for consumers to protect themselves from potentially dangerous products," says Pamela Gilbert, a former executive director of the CPSC who is now a partner in the Washington, D.C., law firm Cuneo Gilbert & LaDuca.



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The doctor will e-mail you now

Five reasons patient portals can lead to better health

Though they may be late to the party, this year you can expect your doctors to join your bank, your credit-card company, your insurance company, and probably even your supermarket and hairdresser in connecting with you online. In fact, you may find your doctor actively encouraging you to send her an e-mail.

Why? Starting this year, doctors and certain other health care providers are eligible for financial incentives under a program run by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services if they make electronic health records available to patients online—and if they communicate with them online. What's more, they have to make sure that at least 5 percent of their

patients use the technology.

You're most likely to get that information through a patient portal, a secured website that gives you access to portions of your medical records and can allow you to make appointments, request prescription refills, pay bills, view lab reports, e-mail your doctor, and add information to your health record. Some provide patient education information, health monitoring tools (such as food diaries, body mass index calculators, and depression screenings), and personalized health plans to help you, for example, quit smoking or lose weight.

Patient portals aren't perfect, and there are bound to be glitches as more doctors and patients start using them. And the government program is voluntary, so not

all health care professionals will have one. Still, if a portal is available to you, there are good reasons for you to give it a try.

1 Portals put your health in your hands

Electronic health records and patient portals “break down the hierarchical doctor-patient relationship, where the patient's health information goes to the doctor and the doctor controls when and how the patient sees it,” says Julie Holberg, M.D., chief medical information officer at Emory Health Care in Atlanta. “The hope is that portals will engage patients in their own health care and change the relationship to be more of a patient-provider partnership.”

Managing chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, and congestive heart failure is easier when doctors and patients have access to the same data. “Putting information in the hands of the patient creates a bit of a drive for them to get more involved in tracking their numbers than maybe they have been previously,” Hollberg says. In a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, people with diabetes seen by doctors who used electronic health records were 35 percent more likely to get all of the recommended screening measures, such as eye exams and blood sugar tests, than patients whose doctors relied on paper records. What’s more, they were 15 percent more likely to have favorable outcomes on those measures.

Another study, by Kaiser Permanente researchers, found that patients with diabetes who e-mailed their doctors received better care compared with those who didn’t. And just being able to access your health data whenever you want can help you remember details about your health or improve understanding.

Of course, doctors often have their own language, so interpreting those medical records can pose challenges. A small study from Kings College in London found that a third of patients who accessed their electronic health records had difficulty understanding the content. To overcome that, some portals have a glossary or information that explains common tests or procedures, or the physician may have created a list of reliable websites where patients can get information. You can also use the portal to send an e-mail asking about things that aren’t clear to you, or of course, you can get information the old-fashioned way: on the phone or at a follow-up appointment.

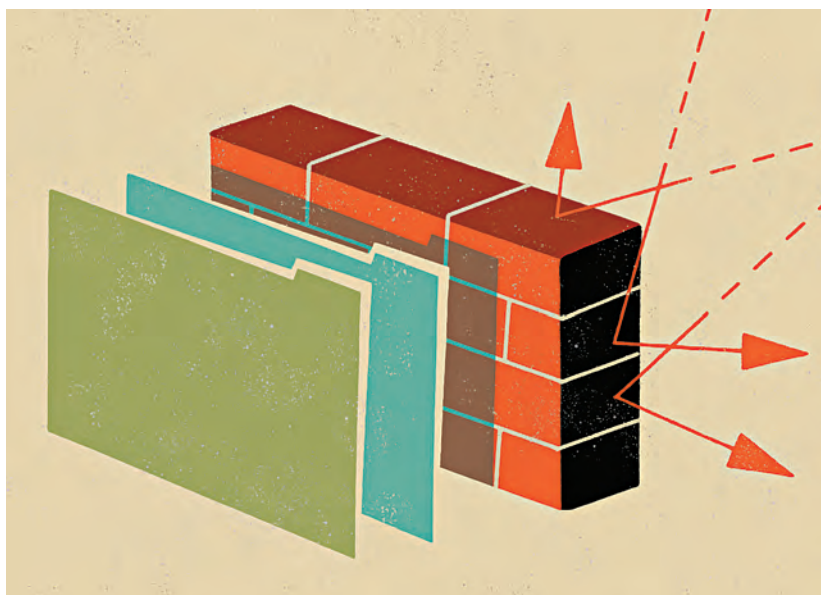
2 They’re convenient

You can get the information you need when it’s convenient for you, not your doctor. “Patients spend more time outside the doctor’s office than in it, and they have health care needs that arise outside of the office,” says Daniel Sands, M.D., M.P.H., a practicing physician at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston and former chief medical informatics officer at Cisco. Avoiding phone tag—either when making an appointment or getting information—is another perk. “If you can look up your lab results in the portal or e-mail me to ask about your medication, it saves you a phone call,” Sands says. “If I can answer a question over

e-mail, it may save you an office visit.”

Depending on the doctor or system her office uses, all e-mails may go to administrative staff members, who then direct them to the appropriate person or department. Or you may be able to send e-mails individually to the front desk for appointments, the doctor’s nurse or assistant for prescription refills, the billing office if

you have a payment question, or directly to your doctor. If you use the portal to schedule appointments, you should get a confirmation e-mail and maybe even a reminder a day or so before your visit. (Some doctors are even asking patients to outline what they want to cover during the visit beforehand via e-mail.) And if you are using the system for the first time and have any



Can your health records be hacked?

That’s the obvious question people have about electronic health records and e-mailing with their doctor. So it’s reassuring that patient portals use firewalls, encryption software, antivirus software, and log-on requirements such as passwords to keep the system secure.

That doesn’t mean they are impenetrable. Data breaches have been reported (though most have involved financial information, not medical records). And as with paper records, the office staff, as well as your doctor, may have access to your information and the e-mail you send through the portal.

Ask your doctor or his staff to explain how the portal works in his office. If you’re not comfortable with the system, don’t use it. If you do use it, take steps to protect your information by safeguarding the computers and other electronic devices that you’ll use to access it.

CONSUMER REPORTS online-security experts suggest these steps:

- Use a computer that only you can access. Family computers are more likely to be infected with malware. And

remember that your workplace computer isn’t yours—it’s company property, and your employer has the right to access it at any time.

- If you share an e-mail address with someone else, consider whether you want to set up your own for communicating with your doctor.
- Install a good anti-malware program. Your computer may be infected with malware without your knowing it, and if so, everything you type, including passwords, might be accessible by hackers. Good choices include the free programs Avast and Avira, and the paid programs G Data Internet Security 2013, \$45, and ESET Smart Security 6, \$80. The paid programs have extra features such as spam filters and parental controls.
- Password protect your computer, smart phone, tablet, and e-mail.
- Store health records in a secure way. Great tip: Once you download your record, move it to a thumb drive and store the drive in a safe.
- Don’t use a public wireless connection. Accessing private information in a coffee shop or on a train is too risky.

concerns about whether your appointment request went through, check by phone the first time or two that you book the appointment on the portal.

3 Accurate records

Patients remember less than half of what they're told in the office or on the phone, experts say. But if the information is in your electronic health record or an e-mail, you can read it, digest it, and refer back to it when needed. If you spot any errors, you can alert your doctor. In addition, Sands points out an often overlooked downside of phone calls. "It's a scary fact, but the majority of phone conversations don't get documented in the patient's medical record," he says. "E-mail is self-documenting."

4 Faster feedback

Under the government guidelines, lab results must be posted in the patient portal within 96 hours of the doctor's office receiving them, whether your doctor has seen the results or not. That means no more waiting for him to call you with results or send them to you by snail mail. It also eliminates the practice some doctors have of notifying you only if something is wrong or just leaving you with a vague "everything looks good." For the most part, seeing the actual values is empowering, but there is the chance that misunderstanding the results could cause you worry. To head off confusion, you might want to talk to your doctor when you have the test about how to interpret the results and what to do if you're concerned about them.

5 More-rewarding visits

It may seem impersonal, but online interactions can improve the doctor-patient relationship. Portals let you stay in

touch with him more frequently. It can even "extend" the office visit. "I might treat a patient and say, 'I'm not sure we solved the problem. I want you to check in with me in two days.' It's easier to do that by e-mail," Sands says.

"In our experience, having open records and doctors' notes enhances trust between patients and doctors," says Jan Walker, R.N., M.B.A., a member of the research faculty of the Division of General Medicine and Primary Care at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School. She is also co-director of

OpenNotes, an initiative that goes beyond allowing patients to see lab results and medication lists and invites them to also see the notes clinicians write about the patient's office visits. Patient portals are not meant to replace face-to-face visits, though. Even for the most tech-savvy patient, there will always be times when that office visit or phone call is best. Those options aren't going away.

This report is part of a series about the reforms afoot in how you will receive your medical care in the months and years ahead. The series is funded in part by a grant from Atlantic Philanthropies.

Is your doctor looking at the computer—not you?

Now that laptops have replaced clipboards in the exam room, your doctor may seem more interested in her computer than in you during your visit. Electronic health records have many benefits, but one downside is that they require doctors to type more of your health information than they used to—and not just about the problem you're there to discuss. That might explain why she may interrupt your description of your back pain to ask about the cigarette habit you gave up in college, whether you happen to be depressed, or when you had your last tetanus shot.

One way to minimize your doctor staring at a screen—and not at you—is to use the patient portal before your visit, if possible. That allows you to fill out information that your doctor or his office staff would otherwise have to ask during your visit. Doing so at home can actually be more accurate, because you will have access to all of your medication bottles, for example, says Consumer Reports medical adviser Orly Avitzur, M.D., M.B.A., who has used electronic health records in her practice for more than a decade and is past



chairwoman of the American Academy of Neurology's committee on technology.

If your doctor still seems to be glued to the computer, politely shift her attention back to you. "Doctors get lost in their electronic devices like everyone else," Avitzur says. "So I actually appreciate a friendly reminder from patients to look them in the eyes."

► CLOSE-UP

E-mail do's and don'ts

To get the most out of the doctor-patient e-mail exchange, follow these tips from Daniel Sands, M.D., M.P.H., a practicing physician at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston who has been e-mailing with his patients for 20 years.

• **Don't use e-mail for emergencies.** "Most portals warn against this in big red letters, but it's still worth a reminder," Sands says.



• **Don't expect an immediate response.** "Your doctor should establish service guarantees; for example, that all e-mail will be answered in two business days. Chances

are you'll get a faster response, but you can't count on it." If you don't hear back, pick up the phone and call.

• **Keep it short and sweet.** "Think of it like a business e-mail. Be specific and concise. Stick to one topic per e-mail. If you find that you can't sum up your question in a short paragraph, it's a sign that you probably need to make an appointment."

Last minute gifts

Still shopping? We've featured products that have been rated highly in 28 categories, including electronics, kitchen gear, and more. The products pictured are listed first; other good choices follow.

Headphones

Sennheiser Momentum On-Ear, \$230

Polk Audio Nue Era (in-ear), \$100

SMD Audio Street by 50-ANC (noise-canceling over-ear), \$280



LCD TVs

Samsung UN50F6800 (50-inch), \$1,200

Toshiba 58L7350U (58-inch), \$1,300

Vizio E500d-A0 (50-inch), \$680



Stand mixers

Breville BEM800XL, \$300

KitchenAid Classic (250 watts) K45SS[WH], \$200

Hamilton Beach Eclectrics 6322[1], \$180

Tablets

Apple iPad Air (16GB, Wi-Fi), \$500

Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7-inch with Special Offers (16GB, Wi-Fi), \$230

Barnes & Noble Nook HD+ (16GB, Wi-Fi), \$150





► **Blenders**

Vitamix 5200, \$450

Ninja Master
Prep Professional
QB1004, \$60

Ninja Professional
NJ600, \$100



► **Tabletop humidifiers**

Crane Frog EE-3191, \$45

Air-O-Swiss 7135, \$180

Vicks V4500, \$70



► **Streaming media players**

Roku 2, \$80

Western Digital WD TV Play, \$60

Hisense Pulse (Google TV), \$75

► **Advanced**

digital cameras

Samsung NX300, \$650

Panasonic Lumix

DMC-G6K, \$750

Pentax K-500, \$600

► **E-book readers**

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite with
Special Offers (2nd gen.), \$120

Barnes & Noble Nook Simple
Touch GlowLight, \$100

Barnes & Noble Nook Simple
Touch, \$80



► **Toasters**

Cuisinart CPT-420, \$80

Calphalon stainless-
steel 2-slot HE200ST
(1779206), \$60

Cuisinart CPT-170, \$70



► **Frying pans**

Swiss Diamond Classic 10", \$90

Scanpan Classic 10¼", \$90

Calphalon Simply Nonstick
10" Omelette Pan, \$40



Plasma TVs

Panasonic Viera
TC-P60S60
(60-inch), \$1,150

Samsung
PN51F5500, \$850

LG 42GA6400
(42-inch), \$850

Brew-and-dispense coffeemakers

Via Brew-N-View CAF-05T, \$140

Mr. Coffee
BVMC-ZH1B, \$50

Cuisinart Coffee
on Demand
DCC-3000, \$100



Food processors

Breville
BFP800XL/A, \$400

Cuisinart DLC-20T1CHB, \$180

Cuisinart DFP-14BCN, \$180



Cordless drills

Ridgid R86008K, \$180

Hitachi DS18DSAL, \$170

Makita LXFD01CW, \$200



Pod coffeemakers

DeLonghi Nescafé
Dolce Gusto Genio
EDG455T, \$130

DeLonghi Nescafé
Dolce Gusto Circolo,
\$150

DeLonghi Nescafé
Dolce Gusto Piccolo
EDG200T, \$100



▣ **Wine chillers**

Haier WC200GS, \$980

Electrolux IQ-Touch EI24WC65GS, \$1,530

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



▣ **Drip coffeemakers**

Kalorik CM 38933, \$60

Cuisinart Crystal SCC-1000

Limited Edition PerfectTemp, \$200

Mr. Coffee BVMC-SJX33GT, \$40



▣ **Knife sets**

Zwilling J.A. Henckels Twin Professional "S," \$315

Zwilling J.A. Henckels Twin Protection #33049, \$600

Wüsthof Classic Ikon #8347, \$400



▣ **Wireless speaker systems**

Libratone Zipp (portable), \$400

Marantz Consolette (home

system), \$600

Sonos Play:3 (home system), \$300



▣ **Blu-ray players**

LG BP-530, \$120

Oppo BDP-103, \$500

Panasonic DMP-BD89, \$90





▣ Cookware sets

Swiss Diamond Reinforced 10 pc., \$575
Calphalon Simply Nonstick 10 pc., \$200
Calphalon Simply Easy System 10 pc., \$300

▣ Basic cameras

Fujifilm FinePix S8400W, \$300
Canon PowerShot SX510 HS, \$250
Olympus Stylus SH-50 iHS, \$280



▣ High chairs

Peg Perego Prima Pappa Best, \$250
Mia Moda Alto, \$100
Oxo Sprout, \$250



▣ Small space heaters

Vornado iControl, \$150
Lasko 6462, \$65
Holmes HFH436, \$40



▣ Toaster ovens

Breville BOV650XL, \$180
Breville Smart Oven BOV800XL, \$250
Panasonic FlashXpress NB-GT10P, \$150



▣ Laptops

MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina Display, \$1,300
Samsung Ativ Book 8 NP880Z5E-X01UB, \$1,200
HP Envy TouchSmart 14t-k000 Ultrabook, \$750



▣ Hand vacuums

Eureka Easy Clean 71B, \$50
Shark Pet Perfect II SV780, \$80
Bissel Pet Hair Eraser 33A1, \$35



LED lightbulbs

As more come to market, prices drop and choices increase

The incandescent bulb's days are numbered. It wastes a lot of energy to create light. The typical 60-watt bulb costs more than three times as much per year to run as a similar LED bulb. As of Jan. 1, most incandescents will have been phased out.

If sticker shock has kept you from buying LEDs, your procrastination has paid off. Store shelves are filling with less expensive LEDs from such brands as Cree, EcoSmart, Great Value (Walmart), Philips, and Sylvania. Because the market is changing so rapidly, we decided to report on our preliminary results of some of the newest and least expensive LEDs.

We've grouped them by the fixture you'd use them in to make shopping easier. All of the newer, cheaper bulbs were as bright as or brighter than claimed, and the light color matched what was claimed. We've also included fully tested LEDs that impressed us.

But watch out, there are still expensive bulbs being offered, such as the two Switch LEDs we're testing that cost \$50 and \$65. There are better, less expensive options.

How to choose

No matter which bulb you buy, there are two things to keep in mind. This information is easy to find on the Lighting Fact label on the package:

Lumens indicate brightness. That's

true whether it's an incandescent, a CFL, or an LED. So if you're replacing a 60-watt lightbulb, look for an LED with at least 800 lumens. When swapping out 75-watt bulbs, you'll want 1,100 lumens or more. Get a minimum of 1,600 to replace a 100-watt bulb.

The Kelvin number is crucial. The light color of a bulb affects how you perceive the color of your walls, furniture, and even food. It's measured on a temperature scale called Kelvin (K). If you like the warm light of an incandescent, look for bulbs marked 2700K or so. If you prefer the white light of a halogen bulb, look for 3000K. Bright white, in the 3500 to 4100K range, provides a higher contrast and is good for detailed-oriented tasks or when working in the kitchen. At 5000 to 6500K, the light is bluish white. That can be good for reading but unflattering to skin tones and colors of other objects indoors.

Energy Star-qualified LEDs are warranted to last at least three years, so keep the receipt. But using a bulb in a fixture it's not designed for can shorten its life. Be sure to check the package.

■ DID YOU KNOW?

Some utilities offer in-store rebate coupons that knock up to \$10 off an LED's price. You'll also find rebates online at energystar.gov and dsireusa.org.

► Lamps and ceiling fixtures

First looks

For white light similar to a halogen bulb, look at Home Depot's dimmable **EcoSmart 12-Watt (60W) A19 Bright White 183210**, \$20, a 60-watt replacement. Like warm light? At \$10, Walmart's **Great Value Soft White LED** is the least expensive of those we tested and gives off a warm yellow light similar to an incandescent. So does the \$13 **Cree 9.5-Watt (60W) Warm White** and the \$14 **Philips 11W 60W Soft White 424382**. For light that's warm but brighter and is meant to replace 75-watt bulbs, there's the **EcoSmart 14-Watt (75W) Soft White 726558**, \$35 at Home Depot, and the \$30 **Philips 15-Watt (75W) A21 Soft White Dimmable**. Even brighter is the **Philips A21 19W 100W Soft White 432195**, \$30, and the \$40 **Sylvania Ultra-LED 100W LED20A21/DIM/O/827**, which replace 100-watt bulbs. All are dimmable, though a nondimmable version of the Walmart bulb is available for \$9.

Fully tested

Among 60-watt replacements, the top-rated **Samsung 60-Watt Warm White LED**, \$30, provides a bright, warm yellow light, and the \$20 **Utilitech 13.5 60-W Warm White LED** from Lowe's casts a bright, white light. The **Sylvania 14W 75W LED Dimmable**, \$35, is brighter and replaces a 75-watt bulb. It offers a warm yellow light. All three LEDs cast light evenly in all directions and can be used outdoors if they're not exposed to moisture.



▶ Recessed and track lights

First looks

Again, Walmart's **Great Value Soft White BR30** is the least expensive, at \$16. It's bright and dimmable, and casts a warm, yellow light. Also consider the **Cree 9.5-Watt (65W) Soft White BR30 Dimmable LED Flood**, \$21, and the \$20 **Utilitech 13-Watt (75W) BR30 Soft White Outdoor Flood** from Lowe's. Both can be used indoors or out and with some electronic timers, photocells, and motion sensors.

Fully tested

Replacing a 65-watt bulb and casting warm yellow light, the **Feit Electric BR30 Dimmable LED**, \$18, is very impressive. Though it's not as bright, the **EcoSmart 6-in. 9.5-Watt 65W LED Downlight ECO 575L** from Home Depot, \$25, is claimed to last even longer, up to 35,000 hours. It fits in a 6-inch can, and installation takes more than just screwing it in, but colors appear more accurately under its light.



Feit Electric BR30 Dimmable LED

▶ Outdoor lights

First looks

The Walmart **Great Value PAR 38**, \$25, **MaxLite 20Watt PAR38 100W**, \$40, and **Philips 19.5Watt (120W) PAR38 Bright White LED Floodlight**, \$40, offer bright, white light. The MaxLite can be used with some electronic timers, photocells, and motion sensors.

Fully tested

The **TCP 17W PAR38 Flood LED**, \$40, (right) is claimed to last about 46 years when used 3 hours a day. It casts a white light and works with some electronic timers, photocells, and motion sensors.



Can an LED really last 25,000 hours?

We wanted to know, too. So when the first of these long-lasting bulbs came out in October 2010, we put two Cree CR6 LED downlights over the sink in our lightbulb lab and kept them on 24/7. It took almost three years, but when they finally reached 25,000 hours, their claimed life, we tested them again. And they are just as bright as they were when we took them out of the box and tested them. Plus they still show the true colors of objects as accurately as they did when new and use 85 percent less energy than a similar incandescent bulb. The light they cast is a bit warmer and yellower than when new.

Leaving the lights on without turning them off isn't our usual lightbulb test, but it shaved around a year off the regular

testing time, and we wanted to observe how these LEDs performed on the way to their claimed life of 25,000 hours.

LED technology keeps evolving. Those Cree bulbs are no longer sold, but the next generation of LED bulb, the EcoSmart 6 inch 9.5-watt 65W LED Downlight Eco 575L, \$25, did very well in our standard tests. It's sold at Home Depot and provided instant warm yellow light, and it has an even longer claimed life of 35,000 hours.



Walmart's Great Value Soft White BR30

Cree 9.5-Watt (65W) Soft White BR30 Dimmable LED Flood

THE COMPLETE

Smart-phone shopping guide

How to navigate the maze & save money



Inside the section

The real costs of phones and plans
page 28

How much data and voice to buy
page 29

Carrier Ratings map
page 30

Phone-feature guide
page 32

Phone Ratings
page 34

7 ways to save
page 36

Phone security tips
page 36

How to sell your old phone
page 38



IT'S DIFFICULT to understand the true cost of a smart phone. In the quest by major wireless carriers to reduce the up-front costs of those pocket-sized computers, they advertise heavily discounted phones, then lock customers into expensive, long-term service agreements and push them to overbuy data plans. Many customers are so bewildered with the buying process that they renew with their existing carriers as a matter of course.

In the annual Consumer Reports National Research Center survey covering more than 58,000 subscribers in 23 metro areas, most respondents stayed with their provider more than two years, the length

Many users stick with a carrier even though they're not satisfied.

of a standard contract, even though only half were highly satisfied. And with each new contract, customers are induced to abandon perfectly serviceable phones in favor of newer, more advanced models. "Wireless service has always been one of the most complex purchases a human can possibly make," says Eddie Hold, a wireless industry analyst with market research firm NPD Group. "It's always been horrific."

But the landscape is changing. The two-year contract is under assault. Our exclusive report shows that no-contract and prepaid service from smaller companies such as Consumer Cellular and TracFone

rank high in customer satisfaction. Those carriers offer high-quality phones, relatively reliable service, and simpler, more consumer-friendly plans. Indeed, Consumer Cellular and TracFone did better than the major standard providers in our annual customer satisfaction survey for the past few years.

Larger carriers such as AT&T, Sprint, and Verizon also offer contract-free services. Meanwhile, T-Mobile, the smallest of the big-four carriers, has dispensed with contracts for service and has decoupled the cost of the phone from the cost of service. Yet T-Mobile still allows customers to spread out the cost of a phone over a 24-month period. AT&T and Verizon now offer similarly structured "installment plans" for phones that allow customers to upgrade their device after six months or a year, though they don't discount their monthly service the way T-Mobile does.

What's behind all the confusion and misleading pricing is the phone subsidy. To make higher-end smart phones that could typically cost \$400 to \$650 seem more affordable, carriers bury much of that cost in the price of service, then stretch it out over the life of a contract. That makes phones cost less up front than they would on the open market and makes service cost more.

Service costs are driven up further by plans that force you to buy data in bulk increments. Among our respondents who had data plans that set limits on usage, 38 percent used only half, or less, of their monthly allotment. As a result, many customers may well have overpaid for their wireless service.

T · · Mo

The best carriers

Tiny Consumer Cellular was the leader in our satisfaction survey, with top scores for value, data, and support. Ironically, Consumer Cellular uses the network of lower-ranked AT&T. (It's worth noting, however, that Consumer Cellular customers in our survey didn't use data heavily.) Other highlights:

- Verizon once again scored the highest overall among the major contract cellular-

New options mean greater choices than ever for consumers.

service providers. Respondents gave the company high marks for data service and some aspects of customer support.

- T-Mobile and AT&T rated a peg behind Verizon, with mostly ho-hum marks, except for AT&T's top-rated 4G service.

- Sprint has fallen to the bottom of the Ratings, receiving low marks for value, voice, text, and 4G reliability.

- Prepaid carriers TracFone, Straight Talk, and Net10 (brands of TracFone Wireless, a subsidiary of América Móvil) beat all four major carriers and got high marks for value.

Smart phones get smarter

Phones have also evolved, as our tests of more than 100 models show. They've never been more powerful, with features including biometric security and gesture control.

All of those new options mean greater choices than ever for consumers, but also greater confusion. If you've been locked into a contract for the past two years, getting back into the cellular marketplace can be overwhelming.

We're here to guide you. We offer a list of 60 of the top-performing phones and detailed, city-by-city Ratings of the best and worst carriers, plus guides that will help you calculate the true cost of your phone by carrier, buy the right data plan, and even sell your old phone to put money back in your pocket.



SMART-PHONE BUYING GUIDE

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



CLOSE-UP

What that phone and plan really cost you

There are several ways to buy a smart phone these days. You can sign a traditional two-year contract and get a phone such as the Apple iPhone 5c (16GB) for \$0 or for \$100 up front, then pay back the subsidy that made the phone so cheap over the life of your contract. Or you can pay the phone's full price of \$550 up front, with no contract. Major carriers now also let you pay a small fee up front, then pay off the phone in installments. We found the cheapest plan possible for each major carrier's contract and contract-free plans, and calculated the total cost of ownership (phone, plan, and any sign-up fees—but not taxes) over two years. Then we added an additional six months to show what happens if—heaven forbid—you decide to keep your phone.

iPhone 5c (16GB) plus plan

		COSTS		
Terms	Carrier	Day of purchase	After 2 years	After 2½ years
Two-year contract	Sprint (1GB data)	\$ 0	\$1,716	\$2,136
	Verizon (500MB data)	100	2,020	2,500
	AT&T (300MB data)	100	1,816	2,236
No contract	T-Mobile (500MB data)	550	1,760	2,060
	Verizon (500MB data)	550	2,470	2,950
	AT&T (300MB data)	550	2,230	2,650

Two-year contracts aren't such a bad deal if you plan to upgrade your phone after the contract expires.

Contracts get pricey if you hang on to your phone because carriers continue to charge the same monthly service rates after the phone has been paid off.

T-Mobile separates the price of the phone from the price of service. Once your phone is paid off, you just pay for service.

Verizon and AT&T sell no-contract phones but don't discount the monthly service price. You'll pay the same every month as you would if you got a subsidized phone.

Source: Carrier website data analyzed by CONSUMER REPORTS.

How much cell service do you really need?

Signing up for a new cellular-service contract means choosing voice, data, and texting plans that meet your needs. But how can you know ahead of time what those needs are? To spec out a plan, start by reviewing your bills for the previous year and assume that your usage will be about the same. Note the monthly peaks, but don't overbuy a plan that covers them all. Many carriers now alert you when you

approach or exceed your data limits. Should that happen, you can temporarily switch to a plan with bigger rations to cover the spike, without having to extend your contract commitment.

We've created four user profiles below, showing voice, data, and messaging usage, along with an affordable plan for each of the major carriers that fits each profile.



▶ Low-use couple

This couple is among the roughly 60 percent of U.S. consumers who still have a home landline, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The couple has two cell phones. The less-techy user has a non-smart phone to stay in touch while out and about, and for emergencies. The more tech-adventurous individual uses a smart phone for checking stocks, news, and weather; keeping up with the grandkids' activities via Facebook; and some texting.

Monthly usage

Shared plan: 2 phones

Voice minutes	400
Text messages	200
Data GBs	0.5

Monthly cost

T-Mobile	\$ 80
Sprint	110
Verizon	110
AT&T	115



▶ Average user

This is one of the 65 percent of U.S. consumers who own a smart phone (according to Nielsen), a group whose numbers have been increasing recently. But voice calling and texting have become less important to this user than in the past, because more mobile communication is shifting to data-based applications.

He doesn't overindulge in bandwidth-hogging activities such as streaming video and audio but can still send hundreds of texts and e-mails per month. His usage of social-media sites such as Facebook and Instagram is moderate.

Monthly usage

Individual plan

Voice minutes	600
Text messages	600
Data GBs	1

Monthly cost

T-Mobile	\$ 60
Sprint	70
AT&T	85
Verizon	90



▶ Power user

This individual lives with her smart phone. It's a digital alarm clock in the morning and is used extensively all day and night to communicate with friends, family, and business associates. The power user stays connected via voice, text, and an extraordinary amount of data for work, social media, news, games, and streaming video and music.

Monthly usage

Individual plan

Voice minutes	1,500
Text messages	1,200
Data GBs	6

Monthly cost

T-Mobile	\$ 70
Sprint	80
Verizon	120
AT&T	125



▶ Family of 4

This family includes two parents with smart phones who use more than the average amount of data for Web access, social networking, banking and investments, and some streaming video or music. Two children, who do a lot of texting, have non-smart phones to avoid surprise high-data charges. Four users means a lot more demand for voice minutes, and those kids sure can text a lot. But multi-line share plans give standard carriers a per-line pricing advantage over prepaid carriers, where you must piece together individual- or two-line plans to create a poor imitation of a contract family plan.

Monthly usage

Shared plan: 4 phones

Voice minutes	1,800
Text messages	7,600
Data GBs	4

Monthly cost

T-Mobile	\$110
Sprint	200
AT&T	210
Verizon	210

Ratings

Cell-phone service

Overview

Standard cell-phone service, involving a bill at the end of the month, usually requires a contract. Prepaid service, either pay-as-you-go or with a monthly allocation, is contract-free.

TOP CHOICE AMONG MAJOR CARRIERS

A4 Verizon Wireless

Among the four major nationwide carriers, this was the most satisfying overall and a standout for data service and resolving customer-support issues.

BEST CHOICE FOR 4G SERVICE

A6 AT&T

This carrier offered the most problem-free 4G service. That makes it worth considering for a 4G phone, despite a worse overall track record than **A4**, if you're a heavy smart-phone user and reliable high-speed data service is your prime concern.

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE OPTION

A3 Credo Mobile

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

BEST CHOICES FOR BASIC NEEDS

A1 Consumer Cellular

B1 TracFone

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

BUDGET SMART-PHONE STANDOUT

B2 Straight Talk

This higher-rated prepaid carrier may charge more up front for the phone than you would pay with a standard carrier's contract plan, but it offers low-cost unlimited voice, text, and data plans, and it earned a high mark for data. In a class-action suit now in federal court alleging that Straight Talk's unlimited data service is falsely advertised, customers claim that their service was "throttled" and "terminated."

SEATTLE

V	T	D	READER SCORE
○	○	○	70
●	●	●	69
○	○	○	63
●	●	●	57

SAN FRANCISCO

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	71
○	○	○	68
○	○	○	58
●	●	●	58

LOS ANGELES

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	71
○	○	○	67
○	○	○	62
●	●	●	59

SAN DIEGO

V	T	D	READER SCORE
○	○	○	72
●	●	●	72
○	○	○	65
●	●	●	63

Major cities

Providers with sufficient data in each metro area, including standard and prepaid customers; not all carriers available in a city may be rated. Differences in score of fewer than seven points are not meaningful.

■	AT&T
■	Sprint
■	T-Mobile
■	U.S. Cellular
■	Verizon Wireless
V	Voice
T	Text
D	Data

SALT LAKE CITY

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	71
○	○	○	65
○	○	○	64

DENVER

V	T	D	READER SCORE
○	●	●	70
○	○	○	66
○	○	○	62
●	●	●	57

PHOENIX

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	75
○	○	○	69
○	○	○	68
●	●	●	57

Overall

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

Better ← → Worse
 ● ● ○ ● ●

	Provider	Reader score	Survey results							
			Value	Voice	Text	Data	4G	Phone	Staff knowledge	Issue resolved
		0100								
A STANDARD										
1	Consumer Cellular	88	●	●	●	●	—	●	●	●
2	U.S. Cellular	75	○	○	○	●	○	●	●	○
3	Credo Mobile	73	○	○	○	●	—	●	●	●
4	Verizon Wireless	71	●	○	○	●	○	●	●	●
5	T-Mobile	65	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
6	AT&T	64	●	○	○	○	●	●	○	○
7	Sprint	59	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
B PREPAID										
1	TracFone	80	●	○	○	●	—	●	●	○
2	Straight Talk	77	●	○	○	●	—	●	●	●
3	Net10	77	●	○	—	—	—	—	—	—
4	Verizon Wireless	75	○	●	●	●	—	●	○	○
5	T-Mobile	74	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○
6	MetroPCS	73	○	○	●	○	—	—	—	—
7	Virgin	72	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○
8	AT&T	69	●	○	○	○	—	●	○	○

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	70
○	○	○	67
○	○	○	65
●	●	●	52

MILWAUKEE

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	75
●	●	●	70
○	○	○	65
●	—	—	53

DETROIT

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	73
○	○	○	67
●	●	●	58

BOSTON

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	○	○	67
○	○	○	64
●	—	—	64
●	○	●	60

CHICAGO

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	71
○	○	○	65
○	○	○	61
●	●	●	57

PHILADELPHIA

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	69
○	○	○	67
●	●	●	63
●	●	●	57

NEW YORK

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	69
○	○	○	67
○	○	○	64
●	●	●	59

KANSAS CITY

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	75
○	○	○	68
○	○	○	68
○	—	—	65

ST. LOUIS

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	72
○	○	○	67
○	●	●	63

WASHINGTON

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	69
●	○	○	68
○	○	○	67
●	●	●	61

DALLAS-FORT WORTH

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	73
○	○	○	68
○	○	○	66
●	●	●	58

ATLANTA

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	72
●	○	○	69
○	○	○	67
○	○	○	63

AUSTIN

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	71
○	○	○	68
○	○	○	64
●	●	●	56

TAMPA

V	T	D	READER SCORE
○	●	●	71
○	—	—	70
○	●	●	70

HOUSTON

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	73
●	●	●	63
○	○	○	63
●	●	●	57

MIAMI

V	T	D	READER SCORE
●	●	●	73
○	○	○	68
○	○	○	66
●	●	●	59

At a glance

Verizon Wireless

Tops in two cities; was joined by at least one other provider as a better choice than other providers in 17 cities.

T-Mobile

Among the better providers in 13 cities.

Sprint

Last in seven cities.

Guide to the Ratings

Based on responses from 58,399 ConsumerReports.org subscribers with cell-phone service surveyed in September 2013. Only providers for which we had sufficient data of the specified type are included in the tables. In both charts, "—" indicates insufficient data. **Reader score** reflects respondents' overall satisfaction with cell-phone service and is not limited to the factors listed. A score of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied; 80 very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied. The following Ratings are based on the occurrence of problems in the previous week and are adjusted for frequency of use: **voice** (no service,

static); **text** (difficulty sending/receiving messages, delays); and **4G** (service unavailable, interrupted, or downgraded to slower service). Along with **issue resolved** (the percentage who said their issue was satisfactorily resolved in a timely manner), the preceding Ratings are relative, reflecting differences from the average of all providers in all areas. The following reflect mean scores on a scale of "Very poor" to "Excellent": **value** for money, satisfaction with **data** service, ease and speed of reaching support staff through the **phone** system, and support **staff knowledge**. Findings might not reflect the general U.S. population.

Get the right model for less

Manufacturers of smart phones are more focused now on making their products easier to use than on introducing features at a breakneck pace. Many innovations enhance well-established components or provide more convenient ways to access them. Here are the main trends you'll see:

Larger, more responsive displays. Screens 4.5 inches and larger were the exception two years ago, but more new models squeeze more screen (4.7 inches and up) into cases that fit in your hand. Displays are more responsive, too, thanks in part to faster, better processors and software tweaks. And more are easy to view in bright light. But pocket-busters such as the Samsung Galaxy Mega, with a 6.3-inch display, test the limits—especially when you hold it up to your ear to talk.

Easier access. Some models, especially Android phones, have very convenient ways to access important functions. For example, you can nudge or double-tap the Motorola X, Droid Maxx, Ultra, or Mini, or LG G2 to see the time, missed calls, and other notifications. That's much easier than fumbling with the power button to wake up the screen. And some Samsungs let you accept or decline a call, move to another Web page, browse photos, or skip a song on your playlist by waving your hand over the phone. That's great when your hands are dirty or you're holding something. The Apple iPhone 5s has a fingerprint sensor that works nicely to unlock the phone without a password.

Better cameras. For years, iPhones were the best option for camera performance. But today's Samsung Galaxy S 4, S 4 Active, and Note 3 have proved just as good for still images. The Note 3 also scored the same as the iPhones for video quality at 1080p, which was very good. The Samsungs and other high-scoring phones that use the Android or Windows operating system have lots of controls and editing tools. Those features can be used before and after you push the shutter release to improve your photos and videos.

Longer battery lives. Four phones in our Ratings delivered more than 24 hours of talk time in one of our tests, and several were close behind.

Ratings on page 34

Smart-phone features guide

Today's phones often come with a list of functions so long it can glaze the eyes. For some customers, more bells and whistles mean more performance and more functionality. Others just see feature bloat. Here we break down the main features to look for, from the essential utilities to the gee-whiz eccentricities.

SHOULD HAVE

▣ High-quality camera

WHY YOU NEED IT Photo ops don't always wait until your full-sized camera is handy. But considering the quality of cameras found in many of this year's smart phones, that might not matter. The phones tend to lack the long lenses and large sensors found on stand-alone cameras, but their software does a fine job of correcting angle distortions, color fringing, and noisy-image problems.

Phone cameras can perform other tricks to fix unflattering shots after you've snapped the picture. Some let you combine the best facial expressions from several shots into one "perfect" picture. Others let you erase a passerby who may have strayed into your shot, or they can start snapping pictures even before you push the shutter, then you pick the best shot. Many third-party apps can add some of the same functions to the phone already in your pocket.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR Apple's iPhone 5c and 5s and Samsung's Galaxy S 4, S 4 Active, and Note 3 capture the best still image quality. The iPhone 5s and 38-megapixel Nokia Lumia 1020 have image stabilizers, which improve your chances of taking better pictures under low-light conditions. The iPhones and Samsung Galaxy Note 3 were video standouts, capturing 1080p video on a par with what we've seen with better pocket camcorders.

▣ A large, high-quality display

WHY YOU NEED IT To most people, a smart phone is a portable window to the world of digital information. The bigger the window, the bigger the view. A big screen has a direct impact on the readability of Web pages, maps, videos, and photos. A large display also makes it easier to interact with your phone because Web links, app buttons, and keys on the virtual keyboard should be easier to spot. Pay attention to resolution—many smart phones now have 1080p displays—enough for full high-definition videos—and some can exceed 400 pixels per inch, which makes for finer detail. Also look for models that are easy to view in bright light.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR The LG G2, Nokia Lumia 1020, and Samsung Galaxy S 4 and Note 3.

▣ Long battery life

WHY YOU NEED IT A smart phone serves so many purposes that you're likely to check it frequently throughout the day. But if your battery dies before nightfall, your fancy phone becomes useless. Big battery drains include weak cell-tower signals and heavy use of the display for, say, videoconferencing and video streaming. Built-in support for new wireless standards, such as Bluetooth 4.0, as well as systems that monitor a smart phone's sensors while the device is in hibernation, can take some strain off the battery.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR LG G2, Motorola Droid Maxx, and Samsung Galaxy Note 3.

▣ Voice recognition

WHY YOU NEED IT Voice-activated virtual assistants are now built into Android (in the form of Google Now) and iOS (Apple's Siri), which can save typing time or let you use the phone while walking, cooking, or just twiddling your thumbs. Phones with that feature send your spoken commands to Internet-based voice-recognition services. The assistants can help you dial phone numbers, transcribe text and e-mail messages, search the Web, translate phrases into another language, get directions, or recommend nearby shops and restaurants. Voice-recognition accuracy has improved recently. Not only can the assistants "understand" natural language commands, but they can also respond in plain English.

NICE TO HAVE

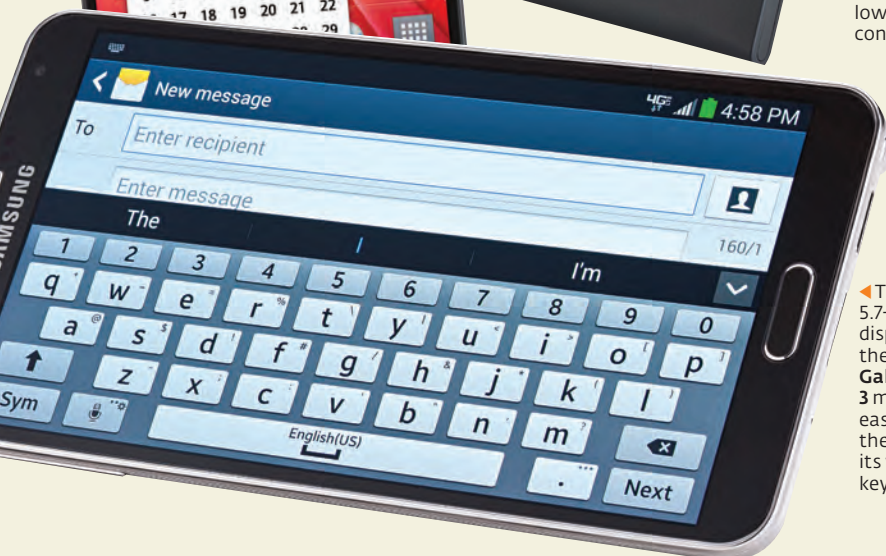
▣ Fingerprint unlock

WHY YOU NEED IT In CONSUMER REPORTS' recent national survey, 64 percent of smart-phone users didn't use PIN-code screen locks for their phones. Typing in a code every time you want to check your messages can be a hassle, but now that everything from contact lists and e-mails to banking info can be found on our mobile devices, not using a screen lock can be a major security risk. Phone makers have tried alternatives to personal

◀ With the **LG G2's** QSlide feature, you can use two apps on the screen at the same time.



◀ The **Nokia Lumia 1020's** camera has a whopping 38-megapixel resolution, and its optical image stabilizer can reduce camera shake when shooting in low-light conditions.



◀ The large, 5.7-inch display on the **Samsung Galaxy Note 3** makes it easier to use the keys on its virtual keyboard.

identification numbers and passwords, including pattern unlocking, which is less secure than a PIN. A promising design from Apple called Touch ID puts a fingerprint reader in the home button that can scan your fingertip. It worked well in our tests and is faster than typing a PIN—taking you from the locked screen to the home screen in a second. **MODELS TO LOOK FOR** Apple iPhone 5s and the upcoming HTC One Max.

▶ **Infrared remote control**

WHY YOU NEED IT Several models have infrared (IR) blasters that can control many common audio/video components. The phones' screens can easily produce all of the controls for a home theater. Many also come bundled with an app that shows local TV listings, program details, and reminders geared to your preferences.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR Some HTC, LG, and Samsung phones have IR ports and apps to help navigate, and even suggest, programming based on your television provider.

▶ **Wireless sharing**

WHY YOU NEED IT Using a variety of wireless standards, many phones can share photos, videos, and music with other phones, or push content to a TV or an external speaker. Many phones can send audio using Bluetooth, but when it comes to more sophisticated phone-to-phone or phone-to-TV sharing, each manufacturer seems to have its own proprietary method.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR LG and Samsung devices can share stills and videos with other phones in their vicinity using a combination of technologies such as Wi-Fi Direct and near field communication (NFC). iPhones can send audio to specialized speakers using Apple's AirPlay protocol and share content between Apple devices using AirDrop.

▶ **Multiple windows**

WHY YOU NEED IT Phones have traditionally been halfhearted multitaskers—multiple apps could run on the same device, but each one took up the whole screen. But as displays have

become larger, new devices can fit two apps on a screen simultaneously, letting you, say, watch a video while reading e-mail.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR The Multi Window feature found on larger-display Samsung Galaxy models and QSlide on LG's Enact, Optimus, and G2 models let you jump among multiple apps on your screen.

COOL TO HAVE

▶ **Wireless charging**

WHY YOU NEED IT Instead of scrambling for a cord to plug your phone in each night, you simply place the device on an AC-powered charging pad. The charging process, known as inductive coupling, has been used for years in many electric toothbrushes.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR A growing number of phones have the capability, and several incompatible standards exist. The most widely supported, Qi, is built into phones from HTC, LG, Motorola, and Nokia (including the Verizon LG G2 and Motorola Droid Maxx and Mini). You can add Qi capability to some other Android phones by replacing their back panel with an adaptor, \$20 to \$40. To charge any Qi-capable phone, you must also buy a charging mat for about the same price as the adaptor. iPhones aren't compatible with Qi. But you can wirelessly charge them using, for example, a Duracell case (\$26 for iPhone 4 or 4s; \$50 for iPhone 5 or 5s), plus a Duracell Powermat, \$40.

▶ **Gesture and motion detection**

WHY YOU NEED IT Using cameras and sensors, some phones now let you change songs, accept calls, or skip to the next song with a wave of the hand. Or you can preview your messages with a nudge of the finger. These no-touch or light-touch interactions can be convenient if you're preparing food or in the middle of a greasy car repair.

MODELS TO LOOK FOR Some Samsung phones let you use hand motion in front of the screen to answer calls or skip a song. And some LG and Samsung phones use a camera to monitor your eyes as you watch videos or read, pausing the action when you look away and preventing the display from timing out when you're paying attention. Some Motorola models let you set up battery-friendly alerts, including calendar, clock, mail, and messages, that fade in and out. That feature allows you to display the time or preview recent text messages by nudging or moving the phone slightly. With some Motorola models, a twist of the wrist launches the camera, even if the screen is off.

Overview

All of the models in the Ratings are recommended and easy to use. Those below performed especially well in many critical areas we test.

✓ **CR Best Buy** These phones offer the most performance for the price. All are recommended.

✓ **Recommended** These are all fine choices and include CR Best Buys.

FULLY FEATURED MODELS

A1, B1, C1, D1 Samsung Galaxy S 4

(16GB; AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon)

A3, C2, D3 LG G2 (AT&T, T-Mobile, Verizon)

A4, B2 LG Optimus G (AT&T, Sprint)

A5, B3, C3, D4 HTC One

(32GB; AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon)

D2 Motorola Droid Maxx (Verizon)

These phones combine large, superb displays with fine battery life and intuitive access to core smart-phone tasks. They also make it easy to multitask and share content. The Samsung Galaxy S 4 has numerous options for wirelessly sharing its content with other devices. The LG G2's power/volume button cluster is on the back of the phone instead of on the top or side, which some people will find easier to reach.

The LG G2 and Optimus G have Quick Memo, a pull-down menu option that lets you use your finger to scribble notes on anything on the phone's screen. You can e-mail, text, or share the image on social networks. The HTC has a sleek aluminum unibody, and its front-firing speakers provide stereo sound loud enough and rich enough to enjoy without headphones. It has an app that turns photos or video clips into a 30-second multimedia video.

The Motorola recognizes your voice, so you can ask for directions or call someone while the screen is off. Another feature provides battery-friendly notifications, including calendar, clock, and mail, that fade in and out when the display is off.

COMPACT HIGH PERFORMERS

A7, B5, C5, D7 Apple iPhone 5s

(16GB; AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon)

A9, B7, C6, D11 Apple iPhone 5c

(16GB; AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon)

A12 HTC One Mini (AT&T)

B9, C12 LG Optimus F3 (Sprint, T-Mobile)

C7 LG Optimus F6 (T-Mobile)

D9 Motorola Droid Mini (Verizon)

These phones fit easily in a pocket or purse. In addition to the Touch ID fingerprint reader, the iPhone 5s adds a digital image stabilizer to its top-notch camera, a plus in low light. Its 64-bit processor is the first we've seen on a phone. The iPhone 5c is like the iPhone 5 it replaces but has longer talk time and a plastic case that's available in five eye-catching colors. It's somewhat heavier and thicker. iPhones are the only 4G-capable



A1 Samsung



A3 LG



A5 HTC



A6 Samsung

Ratings Smart phones

Recommended models only From 108 tested. In performance order, by carrier.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price		Overall score	Test results										Features	
			Contract price	Full retail price		Messaging	Web browsing	Display quality	Voice quality	Phoning	Battery life	Camera image quality	Camera video quality	Portability	Operating system*	Display diagonal size (in.)	Camera (megapixels)
		Similar models and other providers offering comparable models are listed in small type with the phone's price(s). Performance and features might vary somewhat from the tested model's.			0 100												
					P F G V E												

A AT&T Middling to lower satisfaction in almost all cities surveyed but a standout for 4G service.

✓	1	Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB) 32GB \$250, \$695	\$200	\$640	81	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.0	12.8
✓	2	Samsung Galaxy S 4 Active	200	595	80	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.0	8.0
✓	3	LG G2	200	575	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.2	13.0
✓	4	LG Optimus G	50	445	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.7	8.0
✓	5	HTC One (32GB) 64GB \$300, \$670	200	600	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.7	4.1
✓	6	Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (32GB)	300	725	78	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.7	12.8
✓	7	Apple iPhone 5s (16GB) 32GB \$300, \$750; 64GB \$400, \$850	200	650	78	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
✓	8	Motorola Moto X (16GB)	200	580	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.7	10.5
✓	9	Apple iPhone 5c (16GB) 32GB \$200, \$650	100	550	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
✓	10	Nokia Lumia 1020	200	610	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	W	4.5	38.2
✓	11	Pantech Discover	50	355	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.8	12.6
✓	12	HTC One Mini	100	430	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.3	4.1
✓	13	HTC One VX	0	365	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.5	5.1
✓	14	LG Optimus G Pro	100	440	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.5	13.0
✓	15	Samsung Galaxy Mega	150	480	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	6.3	8.0
✓	16	HTC Windows Phone 8X (8GB)	0	425	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	W	4.3	8.0

B SPRINT The least satisfying major carrier in our survey.

✓	1	Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB) MetroPCS \$550, Credo Mobile \$150, \$600	100	600	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.0	12.8
✓	2	LG Optimus G	0	550	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.7	13.1
✓	3	HTC One (32GB) Credo Mobile \$100, \$600	100	550	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.7	4.1
✓	4	Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (32GB)	250	700	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.7	12.8
✓	5	Apple iPhone 5s (16GB) 32GB \$200, \$750; 64GB \$300, \$850; Virgin Mobile 16GB \$550, 32GB \$650, 64GB \$750	100	650	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
✓	6	Motorola Moto X (16GB)	100	550	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.7	10.5
✓	7	Apple iPhone 5c (16GB) 32GB \$100, \$650; Virgin Mobile 16GB \$450, 32GB \$550	0	550	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
✓	8	Samsung Ativ S Neo	50	450	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	W	4.8	8.0
✓	9	LG Optimus F3 Virgin Mobile \$150; MetroPCS \$150	0	250	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.0	4.9
✓	10	HTC Evo 4G LTE	0	550	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.7	8.0
✓	11	Motorola Photon Q 4G LTE	0	400	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.3	8.0
✓	12	HTC 8XT Verizon: HTC Windows Phone 8X (16GB) \$0, \$400	0	400	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	W	4.3	8.0
✓	13	Sprint Vital	0	350	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	5.0	13.0
✓	14	Samsung Galaxy Victory 4G LTE	0	250	71	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	A	4.0	4.9



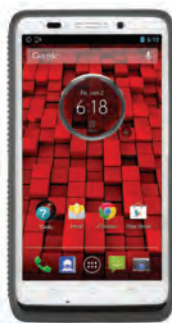
A7 Apple



C7 LG



C8 Sony



D2 Motorola

☒ Recommended

● Excellent
 ● Very good
 ○ Good
 ● Fair
 ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model		Price		Overall score	Test results										Features	
				Contract price	Full retail price		Messaging	Web browsing	Display quality	Voice quality	Phoning	Battery life	Camera image quality	Camera video quality	Portability	Operating system*	Display diagonal size (in.)	Camera (megapixels)
						0												
						100												
						P F G V E												

C T-MOBILE Among the more satisfying in most cities where it was rated.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB)	\$ 0	\$600	81	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.0	12.8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	LG G2	0	600	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.2	13.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	HTC One (32GB)	100	605	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.7	4.1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (32GB)	0	710	78	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.7	12.8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Apple iPhone 5s (16GB) 32GB \$200, \$750; 64GB \$300, \$850	100	650	78	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Apple iPhone 5c (16GB) 32GB \$100, \$650	0	530	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	LG Optimus F6	50	290	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.5	4.9
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Sony Xperia Z	20	500	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.0	11.5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Nokia Lumia 925 AT&T \$100, \$430	30	510	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	W	4.5	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Google Nexus 4 (16GB)	20	430	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.7	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	BlackBerry Z10 AT&T \$0, \$340	100	530	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	B	4.2	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	LG Optimus F3	0	240	74	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.0	4.9

D VERIZON The most satisfying major carrier in our survey.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB) U.S. Cellular \$150, \$600	200	600	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.0	12.8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Motorola Droid Maxx	300	650	78	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.0	10.5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LG G2	200	600	78	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.2	13.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	HTC One (32GB)	200	600	77	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.7	4.1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (32GB)	300	700	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.7	12.8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Motorola Droid Ultra	200	600	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	5.0	10.5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Apple iPhone 5s (16GB) 32GB \$300, \$750; 64GB \$400, \$850	200	650	76	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Motorola Moto X (16GB)	200	600	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.7	10.5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Motorola Droid Mini	100	450	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.3	10.5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Motorola Droid Razr M	0	350	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.3	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Apple iPhone 5c (16GB) 32GB \$200, \$650	100	550	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	i	4.0	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Nokia Lumia 928	100	500	75	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	W	4.4	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	BlackBerry Z10	100	450	74	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	B	4.2	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	LG Spectrum 2	0	400	74	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.7	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Pantech Perception	100	450	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.8	8.0
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	LG Lucid 2	0	300	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.3	4.9
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	LG Enact	20	350	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.0	4.9
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	18	Motorola Droid 4	50	450	73	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	A	4.0	8.0

*A=Android; B=BlackBerry; i=iOS; W=Windows Phone.

models that can't simultaneously support a voice call and an Internet-based connection over the Verizon or Sprint network.

The HTC One Mini has the comfortably curved back and great speakers of its larger sibling. The LG F6 has a 4.5-inch, high-resolution display and lots of features, including QSlide, which lets you see two apps, such as a video and a Web browser, in resizable windows on your screen. The LG F3 has features similar to the F6, plus a 4-inch display housed in a case about the size of an iPhone 4. The Motorola Droid Mini is optimized for Google Now, taking voice control to a new level with its touchless control capability.

TABLET ALTERNATIVES

A6, B4, C4, D5 Samsung Galaxy Note 3

(32GB; AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon)

A14 LG Optimus G Pro (AT&T)

A15 Samsung Galaxy Mega (AT&T)

These phones will be too big for some pockets and hands, but e-book fans and Web users will love the larger screen. The Note 3's 5.7-inch display allows you to use two apps simultaneously, so you can drag a photo from an album into a text message.

Its stylus lets you draw a resizable, movable window on the phone's desktop, into which you can pop the phone dial pad, calculator, and other apps. Notes scribbled can be captured as text that can be edited. And tapping a phone number in that text, for example, will launch the dialer. Its 12.8-megapixel camera is the first we've seen that can capture 4K video.

The LG Optimus G Pro, a supersized version of the Optimus G, has a 5.5-inch display and many capabilities found on other LG phones, such as QSlide, Quick Memo, and an infrared blaster, plus intriguing camera features. The Samsung Galaxy Mega has a 6.3-inch display. Holding it during a call is difficult, given its 6.6x3.5-inch dimensions and 7.1-ounce weight. Display quality is superb, and like with other Samsungs, you can preview e-mails, videos, photos, Web pages, and other content by hovering a finger over them. The Note 3 and Galaxy Mega had more than 24 hours of talk time in one of our tests.

POOLSIDE COMPANIONS

A2 Samsung Galaxy S 4 Active (AT&T)

C8 Sony Xperia Z (T-Mobile)

Both can survive a dunk in up to 3 feet of water for 30 minutes. They also work underwater. The Samsung Galaxy S 4 Active preserves many of the original's specs and features, but it's a bit larger and heavier and lacks a dual-camera mode and the ability to record in slow or fast motion. But it can take still pictures and videos underwater.

The Sony also takes still pictures underwater. Just make sure the flaps protecting the headphone jack, microUSB port, and other openings are closed properly so that they don't get wet.

7 ways to cut phone costs

Save hundreds of dollars per year by making smart choices

► Consider prepaid service.

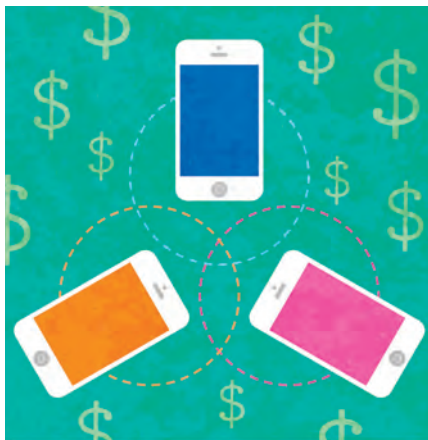
Pay-as-you-go plans used to come with limited service and bare-bones phones. Not anymore. Prepaid providers now have more smart phones, and some offer fast 4G connections. Our subscribers gave those services some of our highest scores for satisfaction. If you're not a marathon talker, texter, or Web surfer, you'll usually come out ahead by paying only for what you use. You'll probably pay more up front for a phone if you don't sign a two-year contract, but the savings on service can more than make up for that over time. Or use a phone you already own and save even more. Among the top-rated prepaid services in our survey are TracFone, Straight Talk, and Net10, all brands of TracFone Wireless.

► Be strategic when you surf.

To keep from burning through your monthly allowance, beware of data hogs such as streaming video and music and playing games online. You can usually monitor data usage in real time using your carrier's app, such as My Verizon Mobile. Use Wi-Fi as much as possible—at home, in the office, or at places such as Starbucks, the library, or an airport—but avoid using insecure connections for sensitive tasks, including banking or bill-paying.

► Check for discounts.

AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, and



Verizon offer discounts to employees of companies that use their service. To see whether yours does, do a Web search for the carrier's name and "employee discount." You'll be directed to a page on the carrier's website at which you can enter your work e-mail address. If your company participates, you can expect a discount in the 15 to 25 percent range on qualifying equipment and plans.

► Consider a family plan.

It often pays to buy in bulk, and family plans (sometimes called share plans) usually provide a discount for buying service on multiple lines. For example, for the usage needs of the average consumers described on page 29, Verizon would charge

\$90 per month for one line and \$210 for four—a per-line cost of only about \$53, or a 41 percent savings vs. buying four separate lines. Sprint would charge the same customer \$70 per month for one line and \$50 per line for four, a 29 percent discount. T-Mobile's 2.5GB family plan is attractively priced at about \$28 per line per month for four phones vs. \$60 for one. The primary line gets 2.5GB of data per month before speeds get throttled. The other three get 500MB, and you can add 2GB to each line for \$10 apiece, still a bargain.

► Wait to buy that hot phone.

Resist buying the latest must-have phone until a newer model comes out and you may be able to get it at a much lower price. For example, if you bought the Samsung Galaxy S III from Sprint when it first came out,

BY THE NUMBERS

21%

The percentage of survey respondents with unlimited data plans who kept them because it was too much trouble to monitor their data usage or to figure out how much they need; 11 percent had given no thought to alternative data plans.

Secure your phone (and everything on it)

Your new smart phone begins collecting personal information about you the moment you turn it on. Before long, it becomes a treasure trove of data about your location, friends and family, e-mail, browsing habits, even bank accounts. That's why we advise you to secure your device as soon as you start it up. Here are three steps we recommend:

Use a lock code. Your phone's display is the first line of defense against prying eyes. Lock it with a strong pass code (PIN or password). The longer the code, the harder it is to crack—six characters is a good minimum. Using a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols also enhances security. Fight

the temptation to base your pass code on a year, name, or phrase, particularly one that's obviously associated with you. Other effective options: the Touch ID fingerprint reader found on the Apple iPhone 5s or, on Android phones, the ability to unlock the phone's screen by tracing a pattern on it with your finger (shield the phone so that bystanders can't see what you're doing). Face scanning is another Android option, though it's not very reliable.

Encrypt your phone. This file-scrambling technique is one of the best ways to protect your phone's contents from unauthorized eyes. The phone's operating system unscrambles it when you turn the phone on and enter the passkey. Encryption is built in

to the hardware of the iPhone 3GS and later models, and it's automatic if you have a pass code (screen lock) enabled. To set it up, tap Settings, then General, then Passcode.

On phones running Android version 4.0 or later, the encryption option is a feature of the operating system. To enable it, go to Settings, select Security and then Encrypt phone, where you'll be prompted to enter a PIN or password. Setting up encryption on an Android phone can take about an hour, so make sure it has enough battery life or is plugged in to a power source.

One thing you'll notice about your encryption-enabled Android phone is that turning it on or restarting it will take

it would have set you back more than \$200 up front. When the S4 arrived, the SIII price dropped to \$100, and it's now \$0 with most service contracts.

▶ Go beyond the carrier store.

Your local cell-phone store may be the first place you think of going to buy a phone, but you might get a better deal elsewhere. When we surveyed almost 9,800 CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers in 2012, the Apple Store, Apple.com, and VerizonWireless.com got below-average scores for price. ATT.com, Best Buy, RadioShack, and U.S. Cellular stores were average for price. Costco and Walmart were the only cell-phone retailers in our survey that received above-average scores for price. Costco is among the best venues for bargain hunters, provided you can find what you want in its limited selection. It has phones from LG, Motorola, Nokia, and Samsung but doesn't have Apple iPhones.

Switch when you think you can't

Cell service is among the lower-rated services we evaluate. That may explain why 31 percent of those surveyed were seriously considering switching providers. But roughly a third of that group said they couldn't switch because of a contract and early-termination fees. Don't stick with a carrier you detest. Try one of these exit options:

Get out free. There's no penalty if you quit within 14 days of buying a phone and signing up for service, so don't hesitate if you have concerns. Even if the clock has run

▶ Think twice about add-ons.

Like other service providers, cellular carriers try to lard on extras, including navigation, insurance, and GPS tracking of your children. Assess those offers carefully. You might be better off paying \$1 per day for maps and directions only when you need them, rather than paying a \$5 navigation fee every month. And take a pass on phone insurance, which runs about \$7 to \$11 a month, or up to \$264 over two years. Only one in five survey respondents had to replace a lost, broken, or stolen phone, so you probably won't collect. If you do, you'll face a deductible of up to \$200, and the replacement may be a refurbished model. Better to hang on to an old phone in case you need a replacement until you qualify for the next upgrade. And although keeping track of a child's whereabouts may seem worth \$10 per month, that's true only if he or she always remembers to take the phone, keep it charged, and turn it on.

out on this one, you have other options.

Pay a discounted penalty. The major contract carriers prorate early-termination fees, so if you're halfway through your AT&T contract, the \$325 penalty for smart phones drops to \$205. Pay the fine, and then ...

Sell your phone and get your money back. A simple way to sell your phone is through Gazelle.com. Indicate the model and carrier and the site will make an offer online and send you a prepaid mailer. Remember to deactivate your service and your password, delete data, and remove SD and SIM cards.

noticeably longer than without encryption. And the only way to turn off the encryption feature is by performing a factory reset on the phone, which erases your files and settings. If you go that route, make sure you have backed up your device.

Set up a phone-finding app. The same GPS and network connections that help you find nearby restaurants and the fastest way home can help you find a misplaced phone and remotely delete your personal information.

With a phone-finder app or service such as Apple's free Find My iPhone or Google's Android Device Manager, you can locate your phone on a map when you log in to the service from another phone or computer. Once it's located,

you can have the phone make a loud noise. That can either direct you to its hiding spot under the couch or expose a thief.

In case you still can't locate your phone, those services can send a signal to erase the data stored in it. Find My iPhone is pre-installed on all iPhones, whereas Android Device Manager is pre-installed on some Android phones. It's also accessible at google.com/android/devicemanager, where it links to your Google account. Third-party apps include Lookout Premium for Android, which charges \$30 per year for remote lock and wipe, and also backs up photos, contacts, and call history, which can be transferred to a new device.



▶ FIRST LOOK

Google's Nexus 5 and the new Android OS

Google's new Nexus 5 smart phone (made by LG) was just hitting the streets as we went to press. Our first impressions of a pre-retail model: This high-end phone offers lots of features and the latest version of Android, which has some cool features of its own. Pricing from Sprint is \$150 with a two-year contract for a 16GB model. The full price is \$350 for the 16GB model and \$400 for the 32GB version. We'll have full test results on the Nexus 5 soon.

Cutting-edge specs. The Nexus 5 has a 5.0-inch, 1080p display and a highly responsive touch screen. The optical image stabilizer for its 8-megapixel camera promises to improve your chances of taking better pictures in low light. Low-light pictures did look very good in our early tests, although the camera had trouble focusing on low-contrast subjects. The Nexus 5 also sports some of the latest technologies, such as enhanced voice command and built-in wireless charging.

Android's new direction. Just as interesting is that the Nexus 5 is the first phone with the newest Android OS (version 4.4, or KitKat), which introduces several clever features. According to Google, KitKat will arrange your contacts according to the people you talk to most. And when you receive a call from someone who is not in your address book, Caller ID will scour Google Maps and other sources for more details about the call, such as the name and photo of the business, and present them onscreen. Another advantage: Music, images, and other files stored on remote "cloud" services should be as accessible as files already on the phone. It also supports a step detector and a step counter for fitness buffs.

What a difference a few years makes

Two years is a long time in the world of smart phones. The state-of-the-art device you bought at the beginning of your contract is now at least two generations removed from the current latest and greatest models. But what does that really mean in terms of functionality and user experience? We took two widely sold smart-phone models in the U.S. and looked at how they stack up against their predecessors.

■ Better ■ Worse



SAMSUNG GALAXY (ANDROID)

	▶ Samsung Galaxy S II 16GB	▶ Samsung Galaxy S4 16GB	New vs. old
Lowest price, 2-yr. contract	\$200 (AT&T)	\$0 (T-Mobile)	\$200 less
Height and width (in.)	4.9x2.6	5.4x2.7	14% bigger
Thickness (in.)	0.35	0.31	11% thinner
Weight (oz.)	4.3	4.6	7% heavier
Display size (in.)	4.3	5	16% larger
Display (pixels per inch)	217	441	103% more
Camera (megapixels)	8	12.8	60% more
Photo quality	Very good	Excellent	better
Talk time (hr.)	7.5	11.5	53% longer

Bottom line

The move from a Samsung Galaxy S II to a new S4 gets you a display that is bigger, brighter, and sharper, as well as more responsive to touch. Apps launch more quickly, and the camera and battery life (including talk time) are better. It also works on LTE networks and has pretty much every feature in the book.

APPLE iPhone (iOS)

	▶ Apple iPhone 4s 16GB	▶ Apple iPhone 5s 16GB	New vs. old
Lowest price, 2-yr. contract	\$200 (all carriers)	\$100 (Sprint, T-Mobile)	\$100 less
Height and width (in.)	4.5x2.3	4.9x2.3	9% bigger
Thickness (in.)	0.37	0.3	19% thinner
Weight (oz.)	4.9	4	18% lighter
Display size (in.)	3.5	4	14% larger
Display (pixels per inch)	330	326	1% fewer
Camera (megapixels)	8	8	same
Photo quality	Very good	Excellent	better
Talk time (hr.)	5.25	6.75	29% longer

Unlike its older sibling, the Apple iPhone 5s can surf LTE networks, and it has a larger screen and a fingerprint reader, along with a better camera and longer battery life (including talk time). Another big change is the redesigned iOS 7, which can be installed on the 4s.

Sell your old phone for more than you'd think

Used phones are now like used cars—you can trade yours in to your carrier and apply the credit to a new phone, or shop it around to established retailers to find the highest price. Here are some of the offers we got on phones that were hot stuff in 2012. Be sure to do a factory reset to wipe your personal data from the phone before you hand it over.

Resale value	Samsung Galaxy S II; AT&T (good condition)	Amazon \$62.25 (gift card)	Gazelle \$60	Best Buy \$55 (gift card)	Apple iPhone 4s; AT&T (good condition)	Amazon \$180 (gift card)	Gazelle \$140	Best Buy \$205 (gift card)
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The Hot List

A monthly guide to the top products our testers recommend

Polished performers. Here's a roundup of our picks to stay connected, provide entertainment, and take care of chores indoors and out.

Your
cheat sheet
to the best
models



LG 60LA8600

TVs

MODEL	SCORE
60-INCH AND LARGER	
LG 60LA8600, \$2,200	76
Samsung PN60F8500, \$2,800	75
Samsung PN64F5500, \$1,800	74
Panasonic Viera TC-P65VT60, \$3,000	73
Panasonic Viera TC-P60ZT60, \$3,000	73
Samsung PN64F8500, \$3,400	73
Panasonic Viera TC-P60VT60, \$2,300	73
55- TO 59-INCH	
LG 55GA7900, \$1,500	74
Samsung UN55ES8000, \$2,100	74
Sony Bravia XBR-55X900A, \$4,000	74
LG 55LA7400, \$1,500	73

Leaf blowers

MODEL	SCORE
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
GASOLINE, 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
GASOLINE, BACKPACK	
Husqvarna 356BT, \$480	90
Stihl BR 350, \$350	89
Echo PB-500H, \$330	87
Husqvarna 350BT, \$300	86
Ryobi RY08420, \$200	85

Generators

MODEL	SCORE
PORTABLE	
Troy-Bilt XP7000 30477, \$900	72
Honda EM6500SXK2, \$2,800	70
Briggs & Stratton 30470, \$900	69
Honda EU6500iS, \$4,500	69
Predator 68530, \$600	68
Generac GP5500 5939, \$700	67
SMALL STATIONARY	
Kohler 8.5 RES-QS7, \$3,200	92
Generac 6237, \$2,250	91
LARGE STATIONARY	
Kohler 14RESAL, \$3,700	93
Generac 6241, \$3,500	91



Troy-Bilt XP7000 30477



Kohler 8.5 RES-QS7



Samsung Ativ Book 9 Plus
NP940X3G-K03US

Laptops

MODEL	SCORE
11-INCH	
Acer Aspire S7-191-6447 Ultrabook, \$900	76
Apple MacBook Air 11-inch MD711LL/A, \$1,000	74
Sony Vaio Pro SVP11213CXB Ultrabook, \$1,150	73
13-INCH	
Samsung Ativ Book 9 Plus NP940X3G-K03US, \$1,400	83
Acer Aspire S7-392-6832 Ultrabook, \$1,300	82
Sony Vaio Pro SVP13213CXS Ultrabook, \$1,250	79
Samsung Ativ Book 9 NP900X3F-K01US, \$1,100	74
15- TO 16-INCH	
Samsung Ativ Book 8 NP880Z5E-X01UB, \$1,200	76
Acer Aspire R7-571-6858, \$900	73
17- TO 18-INCH	
HP Envy Touchsmart m7-j010dx, \$1,000	75
MSI GT70 2OC-065US, \$1,400	75
Toshiba Qosmio X75-A7295, \$1,350	72
Toshiba Satellite S75-A7270, \$725	70



Acer Aspire
S7-191-6447 Ultrabook



HP Envy Touchsmart
m7-j010dx



GE Profile PHB925STSS

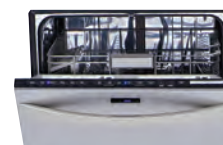


LG LRG3097ST

Ranges

MODEL	SCORE
ELECTRIC	
30-INCH INDUCTION SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN	
GE Profile PHB925STSS, \$2,700	90
Kenmore Elite 97203, \$2,500	89
Samsung FTQ307NWGX, \$2,000	89
30-INCH SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN	
Kenmore 92163, \$1,550 (and similar 95052, \$1,600)	87
GE JB705STSS, \$1,000	86
LG LRE3023S, \$1,000	86
GE Café CS980SNSS, \$2,800	86
30-INCH COIL TOP, SINGLE OVEN	
Kenmore 90212, \$430 (and similar 94142, \$600)	81
GAS	
30-INCH, SINGLE OVEN	
LG LRG3097ST, \$1,900	74
LG LRG3095ST, \$1,500	72
Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3032MW, \$775	71
LG LRG3091SW, \$1,000	71

Dishwashers



Kenmore
Elite 12793

MODEL	SCORE
Kenmore Elite 12793, \$1,350 (and similars 12803, \$1,450, and 12833, \$1,420)	85
Kenmore Elite 12783, \$1,200 (and similars 12763, \$1,020; 12773, \$1,100; and 12813, \$1,120)	82
Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC, \$730 (and similars SHE3AR7[]UC, \$630; SHE3ARF[]UC (Lowe's), \$650; and SHX3AR5[]UC, \$680)	81
Bosch SHX98M0[9]UC, \$1,550	81
KitchenAid KDFE454CSS, \$1,500	81

Reports

Coffeemakers 41

Wireless speakers 42

Ultra HD TV 42

Light vacuums 43

Paper towels 44

Refrigerators 46

Lab tests

Ratings, reviews, recommendations

Coffeemakers with a twist

Traditional French presses immerse coffee grounds in hot water, then use a manual plunger that traps grounds for pouring. Three new coffee machines are intended to automate the process and minimize the fuss and the sediment that escapes the plunger.

▶ Remington iCoffee \$170

This machine did best overall of the trio and makes the most coffee at a time. It looks like a drip coffeemaker on steroids. Hot-water jets in the basket spritz and circulate the grounds in hot water—similar to a French press—before filling the carafe. Remington says the process eliminates the bitter aftertastes of drip coffee. We liked how easy the unit was to use. The carafe was easy to hold, pour from, and empty.



▶ Capresso Coffee à la Carte \$180

If you want something closer to the French-press experience with a tea option, this is the model for you. It works similarly to a traditional French press: An assembly holds one of two removable cylindrical filters (one's for tea) and a plunger. Coffee or tea drips into a carafe or a cup, after you press one of the brew buttons. The removable reservoir holds 42 ounces, enough for a few guests. The machine was easy to use and clean, though your cup has to be less than 3½ inches tall to fit.

▶ Bunn Trifecta \$550

Bunn boasts that this machine offers "a brew method unlike any you have tried before." The Trifecta comes with two plastic "brew chambers": one serves as a small French-press pitcher for coffee or tea, which drips into the other. You get a choice of five turbulence levels and five brew-time choices, between 40 seconds and 3 minutes, so it's easy to personalize your drink. But the controls take some getting used to, and you can brew only 12 ounces at a time. Plus you need to keep the machine plugged in to keep the water in its internal tank hot for brewing.



Wireless speakers are booming

If you have music stashed on a smart phone, tablet, or computer, you probably would love to listen to it through decent speakers without fiddling around with cables and connections. Wireless speakers could be the perfect solution. You have plenty of choices of brands and models in all shapes, sizes, colors, and price ranges.

As the name suggests, wireless speakers don't have to be physically connected to your music source. You can stream music from your mobile devices or computer to the speakers via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, generally using the device as the remote control for adjusting volume, choosing songs from your playlist, and more. You can get wireless speakers with very good sound if you're willing to pay the price: \$600 for **A1 Marantz**, for example. But you might be happy with a good-sounding model at a lower price, such as the portable **B3 TDK**, \$150.

Portable speakers can run on battery power (generally rechargeables), so you're not tied to an AC outlet. Most use Bluetooth technology, which works with a wide range of mobile devices. The range with Bluetooth is about 30 feet, fine when you're in the same room as the speaker.

Home models require electrical power, so those speakers have to be placed near an outlet. Most Apple devices connect to your Wi-Fi network using AirPlay; Android and Windows devices use DLNA

Ratings

Recommended models only From 41 tested.

Rec. Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results			Features		
				Sound quality	Ease of use	Versatility	Wireless type	Wi-Fi technology	Multitroom capability
				0					
				P F G V E					
A HOME SPEAKERS									
✓ 1	Marantz Consolette	\$600	71	+	+	+	Wi-Fi	Apple AirPlay, DLNA	•
✓ 2	Sonos Play:3	300	67	+	+	○	Wi-Fi	Sonos	•
✓ 3	Edifier E30 Spinnaker Bluetooth Speaker System	300	61	+	○	○	Bluetooth		
B PORTABLE SPEAKERS									
✓ 1	Libratone Zipp	400	63	+	○	+	Wi-Fi	Apple AirPlay, DLNA	•
✓ 2	Klipsch KMC 3	400	60	○	+	○	Bluetooth		
✓ 3	TDK Life On Record Wireless Weatherproof Speaker A33	150	60	○	+	+	Bluetooth		
✓ 4	Sony SRS-BTX500	250	53	○	+	+	Bluetooth		
✓ 5	iHome iBT44	180	53	○	+	+	Bluetooth		

(Digital Living Network Alliance) technology. Some home models use Bluetooth instead of or in addition to Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi has a longer range, and with some sources you can stream music to multiple speakers in different rooms.

Bluetooth is often easier to set up, but some Wi-Fi models have WPS (Wi-Fi Protected Setup), a feature designed to connect the speaker to your home network via two button pushes if you have a WPS-enabled router.

A1 Marantz



B2 Klipsch



● Excellent
 ● Very good
 ○ Good
 ● Fair
 ● Poor

✓ CR Best Buy
 ✓ Recommended

Ultra HD outshines 1080p high def, but wait till prices drop



Sony Bravia XBR-65X900A TV with FMP-X1 media player

Viewers dazzled by the higher resolution of Ultra HD TVs might be tempted to shell out big bucks for one of the new sets—but hold on to your wallet. Though the TVs have four times as many pixels as regular 1080p TVs, you're not likely to see any difference in the picture at normal viewing distances.

Our experts scrutinized the two types of TVs side by side to see how they compared. We watched 4K movies and videos (using Sony's \$700 FMP-X1 media player) on a 65-inch **Sony Bravia XBR-65X900A** Ultra HD TV, \$5,500, the best Ultra HD set we've tested so far.

The extremely fine, razor-sharp detail was impressive, especially on the video clips. But in film-based movies, the detail was noticeable only in certain scenes (such as on diagonal lines and in fine text) and only when viewed from less than 2 feet away. When our testers moved back about 7 feet from the screen, the picture didn't look visibly better than a 1080p version of the same movie played on a top-rated plasma TV. We also watched a Blu-ray movie on the Ultra HD TV, which upconverted it to 4K. The edges of images looked smoother, and fine details looked less coarse.

Very little 4K content is available, so you'll be watching mostly upconverted 1080p from Blu-ray discs and cable TV for the foreseeable future. Right now, Sony is the only company offering original 4K movies, and its player works only with Sony TVs.

Bottom line. There's no question that Ultra HD can yield a more-detailed picture, and it can even help regular HD programs look better. But as long as Ultra HD TVs carry a significant premium over comparably sized 1080p sets and so little 4K content is available, they don't make sense for most consumers. Instead, spend your money on a high-performing HDTV that can give you top-notch picture quality. But when UHD prices drop to almost HD levels—and you know they will—and 4K content becomes widely available, the choice will be simple: Go Ultra.

Light-duty cleaning

Before mopping your floor, you probably reach for a vacuum or broom. If so, Dyson and Swiffer hope to woo you with two new hybrids that combine a dry or wet sweeping cloth with a light-duty cordless vac.

But our tests trying to clean up floors laden with dust, hair, stains, and other muck found that both bring some compromises—and the Dyson has a hefty price.

► **Dyson Hard DC56.** This \$330, 5-pound machine has vacuum intakes in front of and behind a wet or dry pad. Snap off the wand and the Dyson becomes a hand vac with two tools for tight spots. The DC56 vanquished oily kitchen dirt, hair, and even heavy dust, but it spewed fine dust back out. It also fell short on wet and dried kitchen spills and wet mud until we replaced Dyson's pads with Swiffer's wet-cloth refills, which also worked better on other messes. The lithium-ion battery delivers roughly 15 minutes of cleaning and recharges in just 3½ hours, but run time

in the max-power mode dips to 7 minutes.

► **Swiffer Sweeper/Vac.** At just \$40 and 3 pounds, the Swiffer Sweeper/Vac is easier on your wallet and your arms. It also sucked up dry rice, cereal, crumbs, sand, and other debris through a vac intake in front of the pad. Drawbacks? You get an old-fashioned, NiCad battery that begins to weaken just before its 13-minute run time is up and takes 12 to 16 hours to recharge. The Swiffer also proved less impressive than the Dyson on heavy dust, and fine dust quickly clogged its filter. (Its wet cloth refill improved all cleaning except heavy dust.)

Bottom line. The \$40 Swiffer Sweeper/Vac is a tempting choice at the price and combines dry and wet cleaning with some suction. But neither of the hybrids vacuumed as well as the best stick or hand vacs in our Ratings, below. You'll also find a \$10 pad-only sweeper a better bet for small spills and stains, but don't ditch your mop.

Ratings Stick and hand vacuums

Recommended models only From 21 tested.

☑ Recommended

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
● Fair
● Poor

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Weight (lb.)	Test results					
Recommendation	Rank				Carpet surface	Bare floors	Edges	Noise	Pet hair	Run/charge time (min./hr.)
			0 100							Low emissions
			P F G VG E							

A HAND VACS These are best for spot cleaning small spaces.

✓	1	Shark Pet Perfect II SV780	\$ 80	79	4	●	●	●	○	●	19/16	●
✓	2	Eureka Easy Clean 71B	50	71	5	○	●	●	●	●	NA	
✓	3	Black & Decker DustBuster HV9010P*	65	65	5	●	●	●	●	●	NA	
✓	4	Bissell Pet Hair Eraser 33A1*	35	65	4	●	●	●	○	●	NA	

B STICK VACS These corded and cordless vacs are fine for short-pile carpets and floors.

✓	1	Hoover Platinum Linx BH50010	150	69	7	●	●	●	●	●	18/3	
✓	2	Shark Navigator Freestyle SV1100	140	67	8	●	○	○	●	●	17/6	
✓	3	Dirt Devil Accucharge BD20035RED	70	66	6	○	●	●	●	●	21/6	●

"NA" means not applicable; corded model. *Lacks an electric-powered brush head.



A1 Shark



A3 Black & Decker



Dyson Hard DC56

Swiffer Sweeper/Vac

SEE HOW WE TESTED

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



► DID YOU KNOW?

When using a regular vacuum to clean ground-in dirt or sand from your low- or medium-pile carpet, set the carpet head to the lowest level. That will allow the brushes to really get the grit out. But don't use that setting all of the time; you'll wear out your carpet more quickly.



Paper towels

The best and worst from our tough tests

Paper towels LEAD a brief and unglamorous life, absorbing spills, wiping away messes, and substituting for napkins and even tissues. Bounty's DuraTowel cleaned up in our latest tests, but there are several far less expensive options for everyday use.

Sponges are the most frequently used item for kitchen cleanup, but unless they're kept scrupulously clean, they can become germ and smelly. Ditto dish towels. A fresh paper towel is a better choice. With

an overall score of 96, the Bounty DuraTowel was three times as strong when wet, held at least twice as much water, and lasted three times as long before falling apart in our scrubbing tests compared with paper towels that scored Fair in our tests. But it costs almost twice as much as many others, making it better suited for bigger messes and scrubbing. Here's what else our tests and reporting found:

Save with the right store brands. Sales of store brands have increased 26 percent

in recent years as families tighten their spending. Walmart's Great Value came close to making the recommended list, offering impressive absorbency, scrubbing, and strength. It's also among the lowest-priced paper towels. Target's Up & Up was very good at absorption and strength, but not as good for scrubbing. But paper towels from Home Depot, CVS, and Family Dollar were no bargain despite their price, ranking dead last in our tests.

Online merchants push paper. Amazon.com, Soap.com, and the websites of many walk-in stores sell paper towels, tissues, and toilet paper touting low prices and convenience. Bulk purchases are usually required to avoid shipping costs.

More select-a-size towels line shelves. They have "pick a size," "choose a size," or "right size" tacked onto their name. They have more perforations, so you can choose a smaller piece for sopping up small spills or a larger one for big messes. The select-a-size rolls we tested cost about as much as regular paper towels, on average. So you can save if you really do use less paper per pull. Though two-ply towels top our tests, not all of them are more absorbent or durable than the one-ply brands we tested. Viva's Choose-A-Size one-ply was one of our top picks.

Green towels still lag behind. There's little or no governmental regulation of many of the green claims on paper towels, though recycled claims have some merit. Seventh Generation Right Size, which the maker claims is made from 100 percent recycled paper, wasn't very good at absorption, scrubbing, or strength, and it's a bit more expensive. The company that makes Scott Naturals Mega Roll Choose-A-Size says that it has 60 percent recycled fibers. It costs less and was stronger when wet, but it's not very absorbent.

▶ DID YOU KNOW?

Paper towels are ideal for cleaning up your pet's puddles, but don't toss the paper in the toilet. Flushing away that smelly mess is quick and neat, but paper towels take much longer to disintegrate than toilet paper and can cause the toilet to back up, especially if you have a septic system or older sewer pipes made of cast iron or concrete.

Best toilet papers and tissues

While you're stocking up on paper products, consider these standouts from our other tests:

▶ **Toilet papers** White Cloud 3-Ply Ultra Soft and Thick, a CR Best Buy, was the softest and strongest. Great Value Ultra Strong and White Cloud Soft and Thick were soft but not as strong. All three are sold at Walmart. Quilted Northern Ultra Plush and CVS Premium Ultra were also soft but not quite as strong as top-rated White Cloud 3-Ply.

▶ **Tissues** Puffs was the big winner in our tissue tests, with Puffs Ultra Soft & Strong, Puffs Plus Lotion, and Puffs Basic offering tissues that were strong yet soft. Same for Kleenex Lotion, Aloe & E, a CR Best Buy, and the very soft but not as strong Kleenex Ultra Soft.



Use it, skip it

You probably know you can prevent cross-contamination after handling raw chicken and meat by using paper towels and hot, soapy water to clean kitchen countertops and cutting boards. But here are five “aha!” uses for those handy helpers and four things you shouldn’t use them for, even in a pinch.

DO'S

- Wash and dry fruit and vegetables with paper towels before peeling to help keep dirt and bacteria from transferring from the knife to the produce.
- Wrap food in wet paper towels to steam-cook in your microwave, creating healthy meals and snacks.
- Cover bathroom door handles with a paper towel before turning them to



reduce exposure to germs during cold and flu season.

- Make a tight pad from two folded paper towels, add some vegetable oil, and use tongs to drag it across your grill's grates just before cooking to prevent food from sticking.
- Clean the rubber edge of

your car's wiper blades with a paper towel dampened with glass cleaner or water and a little dish detergent to extend the life of the wipers.

DON'TS

- Avoid scratching your furniture by dusting with a microfiber cloth or other soft cloth rather than a paper towel's rough surface.
- That roughness also makes paper towels a no-no when cleaning TV screens and camera lenses. Use a dampened microfiber cloth instead.
- Clean eyeglass lenses with warm water and a drop of dish detergent, then dry with a soft hankie or microfiber cloth, not a paper towel.
- Use a squeegee to wash windows; paper towels can leave lint behind.



Ratings

All tested products in performance order.

☒ Recommended

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Rec.	Rank	Product	Roll (sq. ft.)	Sheet (in.)	Cost/100 sq. ft.*	Overall score	Test results		
							Absorbency	Scrubbing	Wet strength
						0 P F G V E 100			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Bounty DuraTowel	34	11x9	\$4.04	96	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Bounty Extra Soft	59	11x10	2.62	75	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Bounty Giant	57	11x10	2.24	72	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Viva Choose-A-Size	42	11x7	2.69	71	●	●	●
	5	Great Value Strong & Absorbent (Walmart)	41	11x10	2.09	68	●	●	●
	6	Brawny Pick-A-Size	47	11x6	2.52	68	●	●	●
	7	Bounty Basic Select-A-Size	47	11x6	2.10	65	○	●	●
	8	Up & Up Full Sheet Puddle Busters (Target)	56	11x10	2.31	65	●	○	●
	9	Brawny Regular	37	11x10	2.35	65	●	○	○
	10	Kirkland Signature Premium Big Roll (Costco)	85	11x14	1.47	61	●	○	○
	11	Nice Premium Ultra Quilted (Walgreens)	35	11x9	2.02	60	●	○	○
	12	Scott Mega Roll Choose-A-Size	57	11x7	1.71	48	●	●	●
	13	Seventh Generation Right Size	58	11x5	2.74	42	○	○	○
	14	Scott Naturals Mega Roll Choose-A-Size	57	11x7	1.60	41	●	○	●
	15	Sparkle Giant Pick-A-Size	57	11x7	1.78	39	●	○	●
	16	HDX Paper Towels (Home Depot)	58	11x9	2.14	36	●	○	●
	17	Just the Basics Paper Towels (CVS)	38	11x9	2.48	31	●	●	●
	18	Family Values Paper Towels (Family Dollar)	41	11x10	1.79	30	●	●	●

*Usually based on six or eight rolls per package. Bounty Extra Soft, Bounty Giant, and Kirkland Signature based on 12 rolls.

Overview

Paper-towel specials are relatively common. Stock up when your favorites are on sale.

BEST OVERALL

- 1 **Bounty** \$4.04 per 100 sq. ft.
- 2 **Bounty** \$2.62 per 100 sq. ft.

If you rely on paper towels for cleaning up tough, gritty spills, say, wiping up mud tracked in by children or pets, or handling greasy messes in a garage or workshop, the Bounty DuraTowel is for you. It will be available in a select-a-size version in February, according to the manufacturer. But if you use paper towels for lesser messes, such as spilled juice or for routine wiping of counters, the lower-priced Bounty Extra Soft is a better value.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY OPTIONS

- 3 **Bounty** \$2.24 per 100 sq. ft.
- 5 **Great Value** \$2.09 per 100 sq. ft.
- 10 **Kirkland Signature** \$1.47 per 100 sq. ft.

Though they didn't score as high as our top picks, Bounty Giant and Great Value are strong, absorbent, and strong when wet. Kirkland Signature was excellent at absorbing spills and is the least expensive paper we tested, but it wasn't as strong.



HOW WE TEST PAPER TOWELS

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



Refrigerators

Our latest top picks are spacious and space-saving

If you're like many shoppers, you want a refrigerator that can store more food more easily without making tight spots tighter. French-door models satisfy some of those desires by putting frequently used items at eye level behind split doors that you can open separately or together for bulky items. A new Samsung version adds versatility for the freezer with superb performance and the most capacity of any fridge we've tested.

Our testers measured almost 23 cubic feet of usable space inside Samsung's T9000, \$3,500—enough to store a couple of 12-packs of soda more than our former capacity champs, the French-door LG LFX33975ST, \$3,000, and the Kenmore Elite 72093, \$3,400. The four-door Samsung also replaces the usual pull-out freezer drawer with two freezer compartments. One of them converts to a refrigerator with additional soft-freeze (23° F) and chilled (30° F) settings.

Our latest tests turned up some winners among other fridge configurations:

The built-in look for less. Narrow doors also make side-by-side models a good fit for galley-style kitchens and other tight spaces. Each full-length compartment requires some reaching and bending, but side-by-sides include many cabinet-depth models, which sit almost flush with counters for a streamlined effect. Bosch's Linea 800 B22CS80SN(S), \$2,700, is our latest top pick among those models and features an external ice and water dispenser and LED theater lighting.

Top choices for value. Traditional top-freezer fridges might not be as sexy as other configurations, but lower prices and the most space efficiency for their size have kept them ahead in sales. Haier's new HT18TS7SP, a CR Best Buy at \$600, squeezes 15.4 cubic feet of usable capacity into its 30-inch-wide housing.

How to choose

Forget claimed capacity. As with most fridges, even Samsung's spacious T9000 has less usable capacity than its claims suggest. That's because companies typically include nooks and crannies that make those claims sound more impressive.



OPEN WIDE The Samsung T9000 is the first truly four-door model we've tested, with a convertible bottom compartment that can be used as a freezer or fridge. Its roomy interior has slide-out shelves (left) and easy-access counter-height bins.

Look for space-savers. Features that maximize storage space include slim in-door icemakers, which free up the top shelf, along with adjustable or split shelves, which make room for water bottles and other taller items. Temperature-controlled bins also let you keep meat, cold cuts, and fish several degrees colder than the rest of the refrigerator.

Check the dimensions. Any size refrigerator might work if you're remodeling the kitchen. Otherwise, carefully measure your space and the room you have for door swings to be sure that the new fridge will fit. For example, while Samsung's T9000 features narrow, space-saving door swings, it's also a few inches taller and deeper than some French-door models.

DID YOU KNOW?

French-door déjà vu

We first tested French-door refrigerators back in 1966, when stingy capacity and high energy costs led us to conclude



that their advantages "hardly seem worth the \$200 to \$300 premium in price." Almost five decades later, those versatile fridges are our top-performing models.



A2 Whirlpool

A4 Haier

B4 Maytag

D4 Kenmore

Ratings

Recommended models only From 283 tested. ✓ CR Best Buy ✓ Recommended ● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Capacity (cu. ft.)	Features
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.			Temp. performance Energy efficiency Noise Ease of use	Claimed Total usable Water dispenser Energy cost/yr. (\$) HxWxD (in.)	

A TOP-FREEZERS

✓	1	GE Profile PTS22LHS[WW] Profile PTS22SHS[]	\$1,400	69	● ● ● ● ●	21.7	17.1	int.	64	68x33x32
✓	2	Whirlpool WRT771REY[W]	1,100	67	● ● ● ● ●	21.2	17.7	ext.	54	66x33x34
✓	3	Haier HT21TS45SW	800	65	● ● ● ● ●	20.7	17.5		53	67x32x32
✓	4	Haier HT21TS77SP	700	63	● ● ● ● ●	20.7	17.6		47	67x32x32
✓	5	Haier HT18TS77SP	600	63	● ● ● ● ●	18.2	15.4		41	66x30x31
✓	6	Frigidaire LFHT2117L[W] (Lowe's) FFHT2117L[W]	700	62	● ● ● ● ●	20.5	17.1		55	69x30x34
✓	7	Kenmore 78892	600	62	● ● ● ● ●	18.2	15.1		52	66x30x31
✓	8	Maytag MITXEGMY[W]	770	62	● ● ● ● ●	20.4	16.7		59	66x33x31
✓	9	Kenmore 79433	1,500	62	● ● ● ● ●	23.5	19.4	int.	54	69x33x32

B CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	Whirlpool Gold GB2FHD[XW][Q]	1,200	73	● ● ● ● ●	21.9	15.3		52	70x33x31
✓	2	Amana ABB2221WE[W] □ ABB2224WE[]	1,100	73	● ● ● ● ●	21.9	16.5		56	70x33x32
✓	3	Maytag MBF2258XE[W] MBL2258XE[], MBR2258XE[]	1,100	73	● ● ● ● ●	21.9	15.4		52	70x33x31
✓	4	Maytag MBF1958XE[W]	1,150	72	● ● ● ● ●	18.5	12.8		50	67x30x31

C FOUR-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	Samsung T9000 RF32FMQDBSR	3,500	83	● ● ● ● ●	31.8	22.9	ext.	70	72x36x36
✓	2	Samsung RF31FMESBSR	2,900	79	● ● ● ● ●	30.5	19	ext.	69	69x36x36

D THREE-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	LG LFX28991[ST]	3,000	85	● ● ● ● ●	27.6	18.4	ext.	54	69x36x34
✓	2	Samsung RF261BIAESR	2,100	84	● ● ● ● ●	25.5	18.8	int.	48	70x36x33
✓	3	Kenmore Elite 72093	3,400	83	● ● ● ● ●	32.5	22.5	ext.	71	69x36x35
✓	4	Kenmore 7160[3]	1,700	83	● ● ● ● ●	25	17.5		52	69x36x32
✓	5	LG LFX33975ST	3,000	83	● ● ● ● ●	32.5	22.3	ext.	71	69x36x35
✓	6	Whirlpool Gold GX5FHTXV[Q] Gold GX5FHD[X]	1,700	82	● ● ● ● ●	24.8	16.2	Yes	60	70x36x33
✓	7	Samsung RFG298HD[RS] (Lowe's) RFG297HD[], RFG296HD[]	2,800	81	● ● ● ● ●	28.5	18.6	ext.	74	69x36x35
✓	8	LG LFC25776[SW]	1,750	81	● ● ● ● ●	25	18		51	70x36x33
✓	9	Samsung RF323TEDB[SR]	3,300	80	● ● ● ● ●	31.6	21.8	ext.	73	69x36x36
✓	10	Kenmore Elite 7103[2]	2,650	79	● ● ● ● ●	25	16.9	ext.	67	70x33x33
✓	11	LG LFX31925[ST]	2,900	79	● ● ● ● ●	31	19.4	ext.	73	69x36x34

Ratings continued on next page

Overview

Our top picks scored at least Very Good for temperature performance and, for most, energy efficiency. Models below offer special strengths, value, or both.

- ✓ **CR Best Buy** These blend top performance and value; all are recommended.
- ✓ **Recommended** These high-scoring models stand out for the reasons below.

TOP-FREEZERS

- A2 Whirlpool** \$1,100
- A4 Haier** \$700 **CR Best Buy**
- A6 Frigidaire** \$700

A2 offers more usable space. **A6** is almost as spacious but lacks a water dispenser. Choose **A4** if you need a 32-inch width.

CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

- B2 Amana** \$1,100 **CR Best Buy**
- B4 Maytag** \$1,150

B2 is a roomy value pick but doesn't offer stainless; **B4** is tops among 30-inch models.

3- AND 4-DOOR FRENCH-DOORS

- C1 Samsung** \$3,500
- D2 Samsung** \$2,100
- D4 Kenmore** \$1,700 **CR Best Buy**

The four-door **C1** blends top performance with the most usable space. For three-door models, **D4** offers the best overall value.

SIDE-BY-SIDES

- E1 Samsung** \$1,400 **CR Best Buy**
- E4 Frigidaire** \$1,100 **CR Best Buy**

E1 offers top performance and extreme quietness. **E4** is affordable and roomy.

CABINET-DEPTH AND BUILT-INS

- E2 Bosch** \$2,700
- F1 Thermador** \$7,400
- F2 Jenn-Air** \$7,200
- F4 Thermador** \$8,000

The cabinet-depth **E2** side-by-side provides the built-in look for less. Among true built-ins, **F1** is a bottom-freezer, **F2** a side-by-side, and **F4** a French-door fridge.

5 ways to keep food fresher

- ✓ **Check temperatures.** The fridge should be 37° to 38° F; the freezer, 0° F.
- ✓ **Keep dairy out of the door.** Instead, store milk and eggs in their cartons at back, where it's coldest.
- ✓ **Wrap raw fish, meat, and poultry.** Place them on plates under cling wrap at the back of the fridge on a lower shelf to keep dripping juice from other food.
- ✓ **Don't overpack.** Air circulation is needed for food to stay cold enough.
- ✓ **Use containers with lids.** Airtight ones are ideal for cold cuts, cheese, and fresh berries.



E2 Bosch



E4 Frigidaire



F1 Thermador



F4 Thermador

Ratings Refrigerators

Recommended models only From 283 tested.

☒ CR Best Buy ☒ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	Capacity (cu. ft.)	Features
Recommendation	Rank			Temp. performance Energy efficiency Noise Ease of use	Claimed Total usable	Water dispenser Energy cost/yr. (\$) HxWxD (in.)
			0 100			
			P F G V E			

E SIDE-BY-SIDES

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung RS265TD[WP] RS263TD[, RS267TD[,]	\$1,400	76	● ● ● ●	25.5 18.1 ext. 73	70x36x34
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S]* B22CS50SN[]	2,700	74	● ● ● ●	21.7 14.5 ext. 75	69x36x28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	DCS RX215PJX1*	2,500	73	● ● ○ ○	21.5 15.7	62 70x36x28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Frigidaire Gallery FGUS2676L[P] [D] LGUS2642LP (Lowe's)	1,100	72	● ● ○ ●	26 16.9 ext. 72	70x36x33

F BUILT-INS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS	7,400	80	● ● ● ●	20 14.3	59 84x36x25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Jenn-Air J542PPDUB[SS]	7,200	80	● ● ● ●	25.3 17.3 ext. 73	84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Bosch Integra 800 Series B36BT83ONS	7,500	78	● ○ ● ●	20 13.8	64 84x36x25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT81ONS	8,000	78	● ○ ● ●	20 13.8	64 84x36x25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Thermador KBUDT4265E[S]	8,750	77	● ● ● ●	25.2 16 ext. 78	84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Sub-Zero BI425[S]	8,000	76	● ● ● ●	24.1 18.3	79 84x42x26
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Miele KF1901Vi	7,200	76	● ○ ● ●	18.3 14	65 83x36x24

D Discontinued but similar model available; price is for similar model. *Cabinet-depth.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is mainly **temperature performance** and **energy efficiency**, plus **noise** and **ease of use**. Scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. **Temperature performance** is how uniformly models maintained 37° F in fridge, 0° F in freezer, at different room temperatures. **Energy efficiency** is electricity use based on our measurements of usable space. **Noise** is measured with compressor running. **Capacity** includes **claimed** (from maker) and **usable** (our measurements). **Energy cost/yr.** is based on our energy tests and may differ from EnergyGuide label. Height, width, depth (**HxWxD**) are without handle, rounded to nearest inch. Bracketed letter under **brand & model** is color code. **Price** is approximate retail, with icemaker if available.

Fridges that faltered

These subpar models scored 40 or lower overall. Similar models, in small type, haven't been tested but are alike enough in our judgment that the same scores apply.



Fhiaba Series

Top-freezers

- Frigidaire FFTR2126I
- Whirlpool WRT311SFY
- Maytag M9BXXGMY
- Estate T8TXNGFW
T8RXNGFW,
T8TXNWFW
- Maytag MIBXXGMY
- Maytag M8RXEGMX
- Amana A8RXNGMW
- GE GTH21KCX, GTH21KBX

Bottom-freezers

- GE Profile PFSF6PKX
- GE Profile PGCS1RKZ
- Fhiaba Series MG Stand
Plus MG8991TST6/3U

Side-by-sides

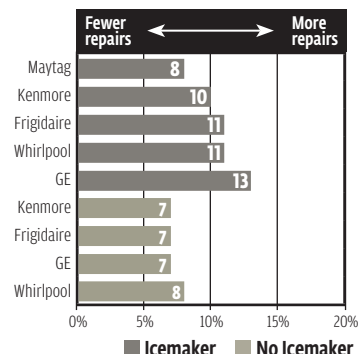
- GE GSH22JSDSS
- Electrolux EW23CS65G
- Whirlpool Gold GSC25C4EY
- Samsung RSG257AA

Most and least reliable

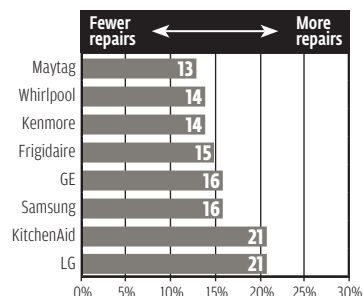
68,300 readers sound off

Choosing a refrigerator with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model. Each year we ask thousands of readers about their experiences. No top-freezer or bottom-freezer brand stood out, but LG and KitchenAid have been among the more repair-prone brands of side-by-side fridges with icemakers.

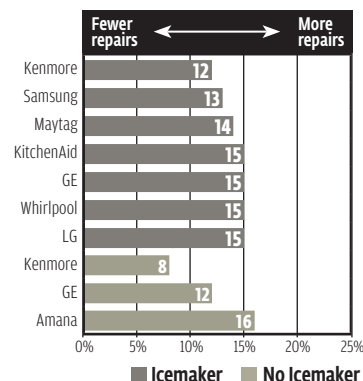
TOP-FREEZERS



SIDE-BY-SIDES



BOTTOM-FREEZERS



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on more than 68,300 freestanding refrigerators that readers bought new between 2009 and 2013. Differences of fewer than 5 points 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 future reliability.

Reports

Tire sealants 49

Owner satisfaction 50

Toyota Corolla vs. 52

Volkswagen Jetta

Ford Fiesta ST vs. 56

Fiat 500 Abarth

Mercedes-Benz GLK350 58

Cars

Road tests, auto products, hot topics

Quick fixes for a flat



FILL 'ER UP
Compressor kits can seal and inflate a tire at the same time.

Remember when all cars came with a spare tire? Today more manufacturers are jettisoning the spare to save weight for better fuel economy, but that often leaves you with only a kit containing sealant and a compact 12-volt compressor. Even drivers with a spare may choose to use the kits or inflators in pressurized cans for a quick fix when they have a flat tire, rather than dealing with a jack, dirty hands, and possibly iffy weather.

To check the effectiveness of the products, we bought five compressor kits, \$19 to \$79, and three can inflators, \$7 to \$10. We found that they can all work in a pinch to get you back on the road quickly. But the compressor kits are more versatile, and they have a built-in air gauge, useful for maintaining a tire's pressure year-round. Still, a properly inflated spare tire is the best solution for a flat.

We conducted two rounds of evaluations. First we punctured the tread of small 15-inch tires on a Chevrolet Spark with a 1.5-mm nail. The second evaluation was made using a 4-mm nail.

With the products, you pump in a sealant that's intended to seal the puncture

from the inside and inflate the tire enough to get back on the road. Each compressor kit was able to inflate the tire to its recommended pressure of 40 pounds per square inch. But the can inflators could reach only 18 psi, so we topped off the pressure with a compressor before moving on.

Sealing the deal

All of the sealants successfully plugged the small nail hole, and the tires maintained the pressure of 40 psi while the car was driven at least 100 miles over six days.

The compressor kits also did fine with the larger puncture. But the Prestone and Slime can inflators couldn't seal it. The Fix-A-Flat did, but it couldn't seal a similar puncture on a 16-inch tire on our Nissan Altima. Overall, successfully sealing a puncture with any of the products depends not only on size but also on the puncture's shape and a nail's entry path.

The Continental compressor kit was the costliest, but it was relatively quick to use and came with enough sealant to repair a wide range of tires. The AirMan, Fix-A-Flat, and Slime Safety Spair kits were easy to use, too. The Slime Smart Spair was inexpensive but required extra steps.

Keep in mind that none of the products should be used to seal a puncture in a tire's sidewall. For that you need to replace the tire. Moreover, any puncture fix is temporary; you should get the tire professionally repaired or replaced quickly.

Also, sealants leave a messy residue on the inside of the tire and wheel, and a tire shop might charge extra to clean it out. Potentially, the products can also gum up a tire-pressure-monitor sensor, risking erroneous readings, although some manufacturers claim that their products won't cause that problem. In our tests, the sensor didn't become inoperable, but it usually needed to be cleaned.



Fix-a-Flat



Continental ContiComfortKit

What we evaluated

Product	Price
COMPRESSOR-AND-SEALANT KITS	
AirMan ResQ Pro	\$50
Continental ContiComfortKit	79
Fix-A-Flat Ultimate	30
Slime Safety Spair	40
Slime Smart Spair	19
AEROSOL SEALANTS	
Fix-a-Flat	7
Prestone Tire Jack	10
Slime Quick Spair	10



SEE HOW TO FIX A FLAT

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Would you buy your car again?

Tesla takes the top spot in our owner-satisfaction ratings

ELECTRIC
Enthusiasm
runs high among
Tesla owners.



Lots of PEOPLE love their cars. But as we've consistently seen in our yearly owner-satisfaction ratings, the vehicles that inspire the strongest loyalty are ones that are fun to drive, deliver great fuel economy, are fashionably green, or envelop you in a high-tech, luxurious driving environment. So perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise that the Tesla Model S all-electric luxury sports sedan, which provides all of those attributes in one car, topped our latest ratings with the highest satisfaction score we've seen in years: 99 out of 100.

While the \$89,650 Model S isn't for everyone, we did draw about 600 survey responses from owners of 2012 and 2013 models. Moreover, its owner-satisfaction score matches the near-perfect 99 overall test score that the Tesla earned in our test program, which made it our highest-rated vehicle. It stands out for its innovative design, outstanding performance, surprising practicality, long 200-mile-plus driving range for an electric car, and low driving costs.

Other models that topped their categories in our latest owner-satisfaction ratings are the Porsche Boxster sports car (which was second overall), Audi A6 luxury sedan, Mazda6 midsize sedan, Subaru Forester SUV, V8 Dodge Charger large sedan, and diesel-powered Volkswagen Golf TDI compact car.

Our annual owner-satisfaction survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, asks CONSUMER REPORTS magazine and Web subscribers a key, revealing question, "Considering all factors (price, performance, reliability, comfort, enjoyment, etc.), would you get this car if you had it to do all over again?" A model's score is based on the percentage of respondents who answered "definitely yes." This year, we received responses on about 350,000 vehicles and more than 285 models and variants spanning the 2011 through 2014 model years.

At the other end of the spectrum from the Tesla is the subcompact Nissan Versa Sedan, which garnered the lowest score for the second year running. Only 45 percent of its owners said they would definitely get it again. Other models that didn't generate much enthusiasm in their categories are the Nissan Rogue and Jeep Compass small SUVs, Acura ILX compact luxury sedan, Kia Optima Hybrid, four-cylinder Chrysler 200, Kia Sedona minivan, and Nissan Armada large SUV.

Feeling the love ... or not

Luxury and high-performance cars tend to do well in this survey, and Audi had more high-scorers than any other luxury brand. But models without a prestige marque or a sporty focus also made a mark. The

redesigned Mazda6 and Subaru Forester, for example, are moderately priced, mainstream vehicles that outscored all models from BMW, Lexus, and Mercedes-Benz.

For the past several years, "green," fuel-efficient cars, including electrics, hybrids, and fuel-sipping diesels, have also done well as a class, even though they aren't known for outstanding comfort, long feature lists, or engaging performance. Especially notable is the Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid, which finished first in our 2011 and 2012 surveys. It slipped to third this time, but its score of 91 was only one point lower than last year's. So Volt owners continue to love the car about as much now as three years ago, proving that the Volt has some staying power beyond its novelty.

That said, novelty can play a big role in launching a car into the top ranks, which isn't surprising because brand-new designs can generate a lot of excitement. But enthusiasm can wane quickly if a car

The Mazda6 outscored cars from BMW, Lexus, and Mercedes.

turns out to be not very special. That's the case with the Toyota Prius C hybrid, a smaller version of the regular Prius. It garnered one of the highest scores in its 2012 debut year but dropped a significant 10 points this time. Other cars that faded significantly in their owners' estimation were the Chrysler 200, Hyundai Sonata, and Subaru Impreza hatchback.

Occasionally a brand-new car craters immediately. That happened this time with the Acura ILX, an upscale version of the Honda Civic, which delighted barely half its owners in its first year.

Perennial favorites that please their owners year in and year out include the BMW 3 Series, Chevrolet Corvette, V8 Ford Mustang, Jeep Wrangler, Lexus LS, Mazda MX-5 Miata, Porsche 911, and Toyota Prius. They almost always rank among the best.



Chevrolet Volt

Owners weigh in: The best and worst models

The models below are ranked as the most and least satisfying cars by category, based on responses from owners of 2011 to 2014 models. Scores are based on three years of data, when available. An

asterisk (*) denotes scores based on a single year's data, which usually indicates a brand-new or redesigned model. The lowest-scoring models in each category are shown in the tinted areas.

COMPACT/SUBCOMPACT CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Volkswagen Golf TDI	81%
Chevrolet Sonic (1.4T)	79
Mini Cooper Hatchback	76
Honda Fit	74
Volkswagen Jetta TDI	74
Dodge Dart*	74
Fiat 500	74
Subaru Impreza Sedan	72
Ford Fiesta	56
Kia Rio	56
Nissan Sentra*	55
Volkswagen Jetta (non-TDI)	53
Nissan Versa Sedan	45

WAGONS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Audi Allroad*	79%
Volvo XC70	78
Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen TDI	78
Subaru Outback	77
Honda Crosstour (V6)	70
Toyota Venza (V6)	64
Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen (5-cyl.)	63
Toyota Venza (4-cyl.)	59

LUXURY COMPACT CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
BMW 335i Sedan	80%
BMW 328i Sedan	76
Audi A4 (2.0T, AWD)	75
Cadillac ATS (V6)*	72
Infiniti G Sedan	72
Acura TSX	71
Cadillac ATS (2.0T)*	71
Buick Regal (nonturbo)	57
Acura ILX*	55

MIDSIZE SUVs

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Ford Explorer (3.5L EcoBoost)*	79%
Jeep Grand Cherokee	77
Jeep Wrangler (4-door)	76
Toyota Highlander Hybrid	76
Toyota FJ Cruiser	75
Toyota Highlander (V6)	74
Ford Explorer (V6, 4WD)	59
Nissan Xterra	58
Dodge Journey	57
Chevrolet Equinox (4-cyl.)	57
GMC Terrain (4-cyl.)	57

SMALL SUVs

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Subaru Forester*	85%
Mazda CX-5 (AWD)	80
Honda CR-V	76
Mazda CX-5 (FWD)	76
Subaru XV Crosstrek*	75
Toyota RAV4*	72
Jeep Patriot	57
Mitsubishi Outlander Sport	55
Kia Sportage	55
Ford Escape (2.5L)	53
Hyundai Tucson	52
Jeep Compass	51
Nissan Rogue	50

LARGE SUVs

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Ford Flex	78%
Dodge Durango	77
Toyota Sequoia	77
Chevrolet Suburban	76
GMC Yukon XL	76
Chevrolet Traverse	64
GMC Acadia	64
Nissan Armada	56



Mazda6

MIDSIZE CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Mazda6*	85%
Volkswagen Passat TDI	83
Honda Accord Sedan*	82
Ford Fusion (2.0L EcoBoost, FWD)*	74
Kia Optima (turbo)	73
Toyota Camry	73
Subaru Legacy (4-cyl.)	71
Kia Optima (4-cyl.)	64
Chevrolet Malibu*	63
Hyundai Sonata (4-cyl.)	63
Chrysler 200 (V6)	62
Nissan Altima (V6)*	62
Chrysler 200 (4-cyl.)	56

LUXURY CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Audi A6 (3.0T)	87%
Audi A7	86
Audi A6 (2.0T)*	83
Porsche Panamera	83
Audi A8	83
Lexus LS	83
Hyundai Equus	81
Mercedes-Benz S-Class	81
Jaguar XF	80
Volvo S80	67
BMW 7 Series	66
Lincoln MKS	63

Porsche Boxster



SPORTY CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Porsche Boxster	95%
Porsche 911	91
Ford Mustang (V8)	88
Chevrolet Corvette	87
Dodge Challenger (V8)	84
Scion FR-S*	84
Mazda MX-5 Miata	83
Ford Focus ST*	83
Subaru BRZ*	82
Honda Civic Si	65
Hyundai Genesis Coupe	58

LARGE/UPSCALE CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Dodge Charger (V8)	85%
Lexus ES (V6)	79
Chrysler 300	78
Hyundai Genesis Sedan (V8)	78
Hyundai Azera	77
Toyota Avalon (V6)	77
Ford Taurus (V6)	63
Buick LaCrosse	61

MINIVANS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Honda Odyssey	79%
Toyota Sienna (FWD)	73
Toyota Sienna (AWD)	70
Dodge Grand Caravan	57
Kia Sedona	56

HYBRIDS/ELECTRIC CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Tesla Model S	99%
Chevrolet Volt	91
Ford C-Max Energi (Plug-in Hybrid)*	84
Toyota Prius	84
Toyota Avalon Hybrid*	82
Lexus ES 300h Hybrid*	82
Lincoln MKZ Hybrid	81
Toyota Camry Hybrid	81
Nissan Leaf	81
Toyota Prius V	80
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid	58
Kia Optima Hybrid	55

LUXURY SUVs

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Porsche Cayenne	82%
Volkswagen Touareg TDI	80
Mercedes-Benz GL-Class*	80
Infiniti QX56	79
Lexus RX	79
Mercedes-Benz M-Class (diesel)*	78
Volvo XC90	64
Infiniti FX (V6)	64
Lincoln MKX	60

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Audi Q5	78%
Acura RDX*	73
Volvo XC60	73
BMW X3 (6-cyl., turbo)	73
Volkswagen Tiguan	64
Mini Cooper Countryman	63
Cadillac SRX	63
Infiniti EX	60

PICKUP TRUCKS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Chevrolet Silverado 2500 & 3500 (diesel)	81%
GMC Sierra 2500 & 3500 (diesel)	81
Ford F-250 & F-350 (diesel)	80
Ford F-150 (EcoBoost V6 & V8)	78
Toyota Tundra (V8)	77
Honda Ridgeline	77
Toyota Tacoma (4-cyl.)	62
Nissan Titan	58

*Model has only one year of data.

COMPACT SEDANS

Toyota Corolla vs. Volkswagen Jetta

After 2014 makeovers, these comeback kids are back in the race

THE TOYOTA COROLLA and Volkswagen Jetta have been longtime major players in the compact sedans category. The Corolla, in fact, is the best-selling sedan nameplate in the world. But in recent years, both were left behind in our test ratings by models such as the Subaru Impreza, Hyundai Elantra, Mazda3, Ford Focus, and Chevrolet Cruze. Now each has emerged from 2014 upgrades—a major redesign for the Corolla and a notable freshening for the Jetta—as more competitive and inviting models that completed our testing in a photo finish.

Already noted for its excellent fuel efficiency and reliability, the new Corolla is roomier, especially in the rear seat; it rides well; and it has easy-to-use controls and up-to-date connectivity features. It's also a good value; our well-equipped LE Plus version had a sticker price of \$20,652.

In previous iterations, the Jetta, with its solid and fun-to-drive character, had a reputation as the affordable alternative to European luxury cars. But in its 2011 redesign, the Jetta lost its way, with cheaper interior materials; lackluster handling; and a coarse, thirsty, and underpowered five-cylinder gasoline engine. Its test score plummeted 16 points, and it has lingered near the bottom of our Ratings for this class.

For 2014, mainstream Jettas get a smooth

and efficient 1.8-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine, improved steering, and the fully independent rear suspension previously used only on high-end versions.

Those improvements transformed the car into a competent, well-rounded sedan with good driving dynamics, a roomy interior, easy

controls, and efficient fuel economy. The Jetta, however, is still pricier than most competitors, with our SE version costing \$22,610.

Only the Corolla is recommended, based on the previous model's good reliability. We don't have reliability data on the Jetta's new engine; the diesel-powered TDI model is average.

Ratings Compact sedans

In performance order.

● Excellent
 ● Very good
 ○ Good
 ● Fair
 ● Poor
 ✓ Recommended

Rec.	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
					0 100 P F G VG E		
✓	1	Subaru Impreza Premium	\$21,345		82	●	27
	2	Kia Forte LX	19,570		81	new	28
✓	3	Hyundai Elantra GLS	19,410		80	○	29
	4	Volkswagen Jetta SE (1.8T)	22,610	●	73	new	30
✓	5	Toyota Corolla LE Plus	20,652	●	72	●	32
	6	Ford Focus sedan SE	20,280		71	●	28
✓	7	Honda Civic EX	21,605		71	●	29
	8	Chevrolet Cruze 1LT (1.4T)	20,530		70	●	26
	9	Dodge Dart SXT (2.0L)	20,680		64	●	27
	10	Nissan Sentra SV	20,570		64	○	29
	11	Mitsubishi Lancer ES	17,515		62	NA	25

Why some models are not recommended. The Kia Forte and Volkswagen Jetta are too new for us to have reliability data. The Ford Focus and Chevrolet Cruze have had below-average reliability. The Dodge Dart, Nissan Sentra, and Mitsubishi Lancer didn't score well enough in our tests. The Forte and Sentra were rated Poor in an IIHS crash test.

Volkswagen Jetta

Toyota Corolla



Volkswagen Jetta

ROAD-TEST
SCORE
73

With some notable upgrades for 2014, the Jetta has pulled out of its downward spiral in our Ratings and is again competitive with the better models in this class. The main reason is a smooth, efficient 1.8-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine that is just the heart transplant the Jetta needed. Performance, refinement, and fuel economy are light-years ahead of the gruff, thirsty 2.5-liter five-cylinder engine that it replaced.

Power delivery is smooth and effortless with no need to rev the engine much. We got an impressive 30 mpg overall—a giant leap over the five-cylinder's 25 mpg—and 39 mpg on the highway.

Another game-changer is the switch to a fully independent rear suspension, which was previously only available on high-end Jettas. With good reflexes and an athletic feel in corners, the Jetta is one of the most enjoyable compact sedans to drive, though it doesn't quite match the agility of a Ford Focus. Response to steering inputs is prompt, body lean is well-contained, and the steering is well-weighted and linear. It also feels more

solid than most cars in the category.

Our biggest disappointment was with the car's emergency handling. When pushed to its limits, such as in our avoidance maneuver, the electronic stability control system kicked in too late. That allowed the car's tail to slide out and forced our drivers to countersteer before it finally helped bring the car back in line. That limited the car's speed in the maneuver and considerably reduced drivers' confidence.

Though the Jetta rides fairly well and feels supple over most bumps, it feels overly firm at times, as if the tires were overinflated.

The Jetta is a little bigger than most compacts, with comfortable front seats and a generous rear seat and trunk. That's great, except that the relatively high price of our car—\$22,610—is not far below some larger, midsize sedans such as the Hyundai Sonata or the Mazda6. Uplevel Jettas have nicer interior trim, but the hard plastics throughout our SE looked cheap.

The Jetta's conservative and upright styling pays off with good visibility thanks to big, upright windows and refreshingly narrow roof pillars. But we wish our Jetta had a backup camera, especially for its price.

The controls couldn't be simpler. But basic Jetta S and SE versions don't offer Bluetooth. Instead of a USB input, the Jetta uses a special media interface for connecting iPods and iPhones.

Best version to get. For most buyers, a Jetta SE with Connectivity is the logical starting spot. It costs around \$22,350 with the destination charge and an automatic transmission and has essentials such as the modern 1.8-liter, four-cylinder engine and Bluetooth. But that price is about \$1,000 to \$2,000 more than rivals such as the Kia Forte and Toyota Corolla. You win some and lose some on the features list; our Jetta has a pretty basic radio compared with those cars, but it also has heated, imitation-leather front seats



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Agility, acceleration, refined engine, fuel economy, roomy rear seat, large trunk, simple controls, visibility
LOWS	Ride, slow-to-react stability control, lackluster interior finish
TRIM LINE	SE
DRIVETRAIN	170 hp, 1.8-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	None
TESTED PRICE	\$22,610

The Jetta line

OTHER TRIM LINES	GLI, GLI Autobahn, Hybrid SE, Hybrid SEL, S, SEL, TDI
OTHER DRIVETRAINS	115 hp, 2.0-liter four; 140 hp, 2.0-liter turbodiesel four; 170 hp, 1.4-liter hybrid four; 210 hp, 2.0-liter turbo four; six- and seven-speed sequential transmissions; five- and six-speed manuals
BASE PRICES	\$16,720–\$31,445

More test findings

BRAKING	Relatively short stops on dry pavement.
HEADLIGHTS	Low beams reach only a fair distance, limiting the ability to see and react to obstacles ahead.
ACCESS	Easy, with large doors.
VISIBILITY	Very good, with big windows and narrow pillars. But a backup camera comes only on high-trim models.
CABIN STORAGE	Reasonable for this segment.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Rear-center restraint is too low, even when it's raised.
CHILD SEATS	Most forward- and rear-facing seats should prove secure.



PLUS-SIZED Like the Corolla, the Jetta is larger than most compact sedans. Among its draws is a huge, well-shaped trunk.

with power recline and lumbar support.

Skip the basic Jetta S. It's an inexpensive teaser at \$18,640 with an automatic, but it uses an outdated, noisy, and very underpowered 2.0-liter four-cylinder that provides neither good acceleration nor fuel economy. You can get a better-equipped and better-performing Hyundai Elantra for the same money.

Toyota Corolla

ROAD-TEST
SCORE
72

Redesigned for 2014, the new Corolla has landed right on target, and it now ranks among the top models in its class. It combines the practicality and frugal fuel economy that compact-sedan buyers want with more interior room, upgraded amenities, and a sorely needed shot of style. Overall, it's a reasonable alternative to a larger, midsize sedan.

The Corolla is slightly larger than the outgoing model, which allows for a surprisingly spacious rear seat with ample leg room.

Despite the bump in size, the Corolla remains small enough for easy maneuvering and parking. And it's one of the best-riding compact sedans we've tested, absorbing bumps with only muted impacts.

All Corollas are powered by a 1.8-liter four-cylinder engine, with a new continuously variable transmission (CVT) replacing the antiquated four-speed automatic on all but the base L version. That combination delivers an excellent 32 mpg overall and stretches highway mpg to 43. Performance, though, was just adequate; no one complained about acceleration, except for engine noise.

Though the CVT has a tendency to hold engine revs high under acceleration, the engine and transmission live in relative harmony.

The Eco version gets a 140-hp version of the same 1.8-liter engine, which is tuned for even better gas mileage. Still, given the frugal

performance of the standard Corolla LE, we don't see the need to spend the extra \$1,095 for the Eco.

Handling is more responsive and very secure, but it hasn't improved enough to match the best cars in this class. With sportier suspension tuning, the top-trim S version is a bit more engaging to drive, with no real loss of ride comfort. But it's still no sports sedan. The Ford Focus and Mazda3 are more fun to drive.

Despite its redesign, interior fit and finish is a mixed bag that doesn't live up to the nicer cabins of the Chevrolet Cruze and Focus.

Front-seat comfort is adequate, but some of us missed an adjustable lumbar-support feature. The telescoping steering wheel doesn't pull out very far, leaving the wheel a long reach away.

Upgraded electronics include Bluetooth connectivity and a touch-screen audio system with controls that are straightforward and easy to use. One gripe: The onscreen preset buttons are small and clustered tightly together. Bluetooth phone pairing is very simple, and the system reconnects quickly when you get into the car. Playing music from an Android device, iPhone, or iPod is easy, with very good compatibility. Voice commands control only the phone unless you get the navigation system. Unfortunately, the headlight switch is designed in a way that makes canceling the daytime running lights too easy.

Best version to get. The LE trim strikes the best balance of features and price, and it includes some nice extras such as a touch-screen audio system, backup camera, and automatic climate control. LE Plus versions add alloy wheels. At \$20,652, including an optional \$850 sunroof, our tested LE Plus is a good value. That said, Toyota is one of the few companies that charges extra for floor mats; with a trunk mat, they added \$225 to our car's price. Skip the base L model with its antiquated four-speed automatic transmission.



FIRST CLASS The Corolla has one of the roomiest rear seats in the class, rivaling that of some midsize sedans.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Ride, fuel economy, interior space, value, large trunk, secure emergency handling
LOWS	Lackluster handling, inconsistent interior quality, too easy to turn DRL off
TRIM LINE	LE Plus
DRIVETRAIN	132-hp, 1.8-liter four-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Moonroof, floor mats
TESTED PRICE	\$20,652

The Corolla line

OTHER TRIM LINES	L, LE, LE Eco, LE Premium, S
OTHER DRIVETRAINS	140-hp, 1.8-liter four-cylinder engine; six-speed manual transmission; four-speed automatic transmission
BASE PRICES	\$16,800-\$19,000

More test findings

BRAKING	Relatively short stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	LED low beams provided some of the best visibility we've seen.
ACCESS	Fairly easy.
VISIBILITY	Good, thanks to large windows and moderately thick roof pillars. A backup camera is standard on all but the base model.
CABIN STORAGE	Minimal.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Rear-center restraint is not tall enough, even when it's raised.
CHILD SEATS	Most forward- and rear-facing seats install securely.



SET AND FORGET We welcomed the automatic temperature control, which is an unusual feature in this class.



Recommended



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SPORTY HATCHBACKS

Ford Fiesta ST vs. Fiat 500 Abarth

Two new hot hatches, with one clear winner



Cars that are frugal, affordable, and easy to park don't have to be boring to drive. That's clearly the message that links the Ford Fiesta ST and the Fiat 500 Abarth subcompact hatchbacks. Both are sporty makeovers of existing models that seem to have had the in-house tuners working late into the night. And the results

have given the unassuming-looking mini cars distinctively oversized personalities.

Of the two, the Fiesta ST is easily the more successful outcome. It was clearly developed by people who like driving. Even the most diehard enthusiasts at our test track were impressed with its handling, steering responsiveness, and sporty-sounding engine.

Agile handling, especially, is the Fiesta's strong suit, complemented by steering that has immediate and near-telepathic responsiveness. But there's much more. The 197-hp turbocharged four-cylinder engine pulls strongly in just about any gear. The car's amazing braking performance is more reminiscent of a Corvette or Porsche than a small hatchback. And unlike some sporty cars, the ST doesn't beat you up with obnoxious noise levels; it emits an invigorating growl that's music to an enthusiast's ears.

Then there's the 500 Abarth. Yes, this pint-sized two-door car oozes with its own character, announcing its presence with a raucous exhaust note that barks, snarls,



TIGHT SQUEEZE The Fiesta ST's optional Recaro seats hold you nicely in corners, but they may be too snug for some people.



FORWARD FASHION Support is uneven in the Fiat's seats, and there's no lumbar support.

and pops with every gearshift. But it can't back up that sporty image with convincing performance or a particularly engaging driving experience.

The Abarth handles nimbly, with impressive

tire grip, but its disappointingly vague steering robs it of the finesse and pinpoint accuracy of the Fiesta ST. Adding a turbocharger to the regular 500's normally lethargic 1.4-liter four-cylinder engine brings a welcome energy boost, but acceleration tapers off relatively quickly. And the Abarth can be rather taxing over the long term. The ride is extremely stiff, even to the point of making the car skittish in bumpy corners. There's a constant barrage of cabin noise, and the driving position is awkward. The rear seat is better suited for packages than for people. And, well, that exhaust note: After the novelty wears off, it's just plain loud, with the relentless noise becoming tiresome on longer drives.

Thinking small

As you might expect with these sporty cars, neither provides a comfortable ride. They are stiff and busy, even on seemingly smooth roads, although the Fiesta provides token isolation on bumps.

The Fiesta's spirited engine delivers instant throttle response. And both cars deliver good fuel economy: 29 mpg overall for the Fiesta ST and 28 for the Abarth. Still, we expected even more from the smaller Fiat. And both are slightly below the Mini Cooper S's 30 mpg. With either, you can only get a manual transmission, so plan on shifting yourself.

Inside, each car demands compromises. The Fiesta is a narrow car, so it might be tight for larger drivers. The interior finish is decent,

and the attractive optional Recaro seats look cool. The seats hug you tightly in corners, but they're extremely confining for many drivers, who felt squeezed by the aggressive bolsters. So try before you buy.

The Fiesta ST has Ford's complicated MyFord Touch system, which can be cumbersome to use in even the best circumstances. In the ST, the touch screen is 6.5 inches, instead of the usual 8 inches, and it's mounted far from the driver. The smaller screen makes the already small fonts and tightly clustered buttons harder to use while driving, and having to operate them while stretching out your arm and being bounced around by the stiff suspension is especially tough going. You have a better chance of getting the response you want by using the voice controls.

The Abarth's controls aren't complicated, but they still leave plenty of room for improvement. The radio has no knobs, instead using push buttons for volume and tuning, which makes adjustments tedious. In addition, the confines of the narrow cabin and the lack of a telescoping steering wheel mean that the driver has to adapt to the 500, rather than the other way around. Sliding the seat forward to reach the wheel makes the pedals too close.

The bottom line? The Fiesta ST is a joy to drive, and zipping happily along a winding back road can make you forget about its few negatives. We just can't say the same about the Abarth. Moreover, the ST's four-door body style is more practical than the Fiat's two-door design. And the fact that the \$24,985 Ford is also less expensive than the Fiat makes the comparison a no-brainer.

We can't recommend either car here because of insufficient reliability data. But it's worth noting that both the conventional Fiesta and 500 have had well below average reliability.

Best versions to get. You don't get a lot of choices with the Fiesta ST, but the base car comes well-equipped. Unless you're comfortable in skinny jeans, you may want to bypass the confining \$1,995 Recaro seats. If you choose the 500 Abarth, we'd skip loading on a lot of options, although we would get the \$900 Comfort/Convenience group to add automatic climate control and heated front seats. Both the ST and Abarth come with a free day of professional instruction at a high-performance driving school, making them the least expensive cars to offer that perk.



Ford Fiesta ST



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Handling agility, fun to drive, effortless power delivery, sound, braking, fuel economy, four-door practicality
LOWS	MyFord Touch controls, not everyone fits into the optional Recaro seats, ride
TRIM LINE	ST
DRIVETRAIN	197-hp, 1.6-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed manual transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	ST Recaro package (heated seats and mirrors), moonroof
TESTED PRICE	\$24,985

More test findings

BRAKING	Among the best we've ever tested, with very short stops and great pedal modulation.
HEADLIGHTS	Good visibility and intensity overall.
ACCESS	The doors are small but square, which reduces the need to duck. It's hard to climb out of the deeply bolstered Recaro front seats.
VISIBILITY	Good to the front and sides, but large head restraints block the view through the small rear window. There's no backup camera.
CABIN STORAGE	Very little cabin storage in this pint-sized runabout.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The rear-center restraint is not tall enough, even when it's raised.
CHILD SEATS	Installations are difficult, and rear-facing seats leave little leg room for front occupants.



Scan for video.



Fiat 500 Abarth



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Invigorating exhaust note, agility, braking, distinctive character
LOWS	Relentlessly noisy, stiff ride, short on steering feel, awkward driving position, turning circle, controls, tiny rear seat and cargo area, rear visibility
TRIM LINE	Abarth
DRIVETRAIN	160-hp, 1.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; five-speed manual transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Automatic climate control, heated seats, sunroof, 17-inch wheels
TESTED PRICE	\$26,050

More test findings

BRAKING	Very short stops.
HEADLIGHTS	Very good reach makes them pleasing for the driver, though they are not especially bright.
ACCESS	Large, tall doors help with front access, but it's a squeeze to get into the tiny rear seat.
VISIBILITY	Large windshield and side windows provide good views to the front and sides. The over-the-shoulder and rear views are impeded by thick pillars and a small rear window.
CABIN STORAGE	The bare-bones minimum, with small door and console pockets.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The rear restraints must be raised to provide any protection.
CHILD SEATS	A very tight rear seat and limited leg room can make installing rear-facing seats difficult, and they leave limited room for front occupants.



Scan for video.

How they compare

Rec.	SPORTY HATCHBACKS	0	100
		P F G V G E	
	Ford Fiesta ST	80	
	Mini Cooper S	74	
	Fiat 500 Abarth	71	



Recommended



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Acceleration, agility, visibility, front-seat comfort, fit and finish
LOWS	Tight rear seat, ride can be rocky, some controls, rear access
TRIM LINE	350 4Matic
DRIVETRAIN	302-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; seven-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	19-inch wheels, Premium Package (seat memory and power lumbar, power liftgate, panorama sunroof, media interface, satellite radio), Becker Map Pilot navigation
TESTED PRICE	\$44,995

More test findings

BRAKING	Wet stops took longer than expected, and long pedal travel takes getting used to.
HEADLIGHTS	Standard halogen low beams don't shine far enough.
ACCESS	Good to the front; a narrow foot path restricts rear access.
VISIBILITY	Very good, although a backup camera is available only in a pricey option package.
CABIN STORAGE	Modest.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Center-rear must be raised for adequate protection.
CHILD SEATS	Seat belts are too narrow to secure rear-facing seats in the center. LATCH anchors in the outboard seats are easy to access.



Scan for video.

How they compare

Rec.	LUXURY COMPACT SUVs	0	100
		P	F G V E
✓	BMW X3 xDrive28i (2.0T)	80	
✓	Acura RDX	79	
✓	Mercedes-Benz GLK350	77	
✓	Audi Q5 Premium Plus (2.0T)	77	
✓	Volvo XC60 T6	70	
	Cadillac SRX Luxury	62	

Mercedes-Benz GLK350

ROAD-TEST SCORE
77

The compact GLK is for drivers who want an engaging, entertaining, full-featured SUV but don't need a lot of rear-seat room or cargo space. That might not seem like your typical SUV buyer, but the GLK is not your typical SUV.

With strong acceleration and agile handling, our GLK350 is thoroughly enjoyable to drive. For 2013, it received a new direct-injected 302-hp V6 that's mated to a smooth-shifting seven-speed automatic transmission. The pair powers the GLK to a 6.1-second 0-to-60-mph sprint that's as quick as a Porsche Boxster's. And plenty of pull is available at every speed.

In addition, the new V6 is a guilt-free pleasure because in addition to its brisk acceleration, fuel economy climbed to 21 mpg overall. That's 3 mpg better than the last GLK we tested, although it's slightly less than other top models in this class. Like most competitors, it needs premium fuel.

Helping its gas mileage is a relatively smooth start/stop system that automatically shuts off the engine when the vehicle is stopped and restarts it when it's time to go. For even better fuel mileage, you can opt for the GLK250 BlueTec model,

with a turbodiesel four-cylinder engine.

In corners, the GLK feels compact and light on its feet, with well-contained body roll. The steering is fairly quick and well weighted, although it doesn't give much feedback.

When pushed to its handling limits at our track, the GLK was secure and predictable, providing decent driver confidence while negotiating our avoidance maneuver.

Normally, the GLK rides well, but some uneven roads can cause quick side-to-side motions, especially at low speeds.

Inside, the cabin is very nicely finished, with the update imparting a luxurious, substantial look and feel. Occupants are treated to comfortable, supportive front seats, with plenty of room, and refreshingly good visibility. But we found it shocking that our \$45,000 GLK didn't have a backup camera.

Rear-seat passengers, on the other hand, will find very tight accommodations and difficult access. And the cargo area is rather modest for the class.

Overall, the controls aren't as complicated as in Audi and BMW models, but some take getting used to.

Reliability has been above average.

Best version to buy. We recommend getting the Premium I Package, which includes a nice panoramic sunroof, an MP3 interface, and a power liftgate. Skip the optional running boards because they just get in the way. We'd also pass on paying extra for leather upholstery because the standard MB-Tex upholstery is a great imitation. A backup camera is available only with the \$2,860 Multimedia package that includes a navigation system. Our car's stand-alone Becker navigation system didn't have one.



PACK LIGHTLY The rear cargo area is rather modest for an SUV, although the compartment is beautifully finished.

Compare

✓ Recommended

✓ Recommended



VERSION	Volkswagen Jetta	Toyota Corolla	Ford Fiesta	Fiat 500	Mercedes-Benz GLK350
TRIM LINE	SE	LE Plus	ST	Abarth	—
PRICE: BASE/TESTED ^①	\$21,520/\$22,610	\$18,700/\$20,652	\$21,400/\$24,985	\$22,000/\$26,050	\$39,090/\$44,995
DRIVETRAIN					
Engine	1.8-liter 4-cyl. (170 hp) turbo	1.8-liter 4-cyl. (132 hp)	1.6-liter 4-cyl. (197 hp) turbo	1.4-liter 4-cyl. (160 hp) turbo	3.5-liter V6 (302 hp)
Transmission	6-speed automatic	CVT	6-speed manual	5-speed manual	7-speed automatic
Drive wheels	Front	Front	Front	Front	AWD
TIRES TESTED					
Model & size	Bridgestone Turanza EL400, size 205/55R16 91H	Goodyear Eagle RS-A, size P205/55R16 89H	Bridgestone Potenza RE050A, size 205/40R17 84W	Pirelli P Zero Nero, size 205/40ZR17 84W	Continental 4X4 Contact, size 235/50R19 99H
RATINGS					
PERFORMANCE					
Acceleration	⬤	○	⬤	⬤	⬤
0 to 60 mph, sec.	8.5	9.9	7.3	8.0	6.1
45 to 65 mph, sec.	5.7	5.9	4.4	4.1	4.4
Quarter-mile, sec.	16.5	17.7	15.6	16.1	14.7
Transmission	⬤	⬤	⬤	⬤	⬤
Routine handling	⬤	○	⬤	⬤	⬤
Emergency handling	○	⬤	⬤	⬤	○
Avoidance maneuver, speed, mph	52.0	54.5	57.0	55.5	50.0
Braking	⬤	⬤	⬤	⬤	⬤
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	137/151	138/149	118/124	125/126	130/144
Headlights	⬤	⬤	○	⬤	⬤
COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE					
Ride	○	⬤	⬤	⬤	⬤
Noise	⬤	○	○	⬤	⬤
Driving position	⬤	○	○	○	⬤
Front-seat comfort	⬤	○	⬤	○	⬤
Rear-seat comfort	⬤	⬤	⬤	⬤	○
Access	⬤	⬤	○	⬤	⬤
Controls and displays	⬤	⬤	⬤	○	○
Interior fit and finish	⬤	○	○	○	⬤
Trunk/cargo area	○	○	⬤	⬤	○
PREDICTED RELIABILITY	New	⬤	New	NA	⬤
FUEL					
Overall mpg	30	32	29	28	21
City/highway mpg	21/39	23/43	21/36	21/34	14/29
Type	regular	regular	regular	premium	premium
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, miles	14.5/430	13.2/425	12.7/365	10.5/295	17.4/360
Annual cost, 12K miles	\$1,420 @ \$3.50/gal.	\$1,300 @ \$3.50/gal.	\$1,460 @ \$3.50/gal.	\$1,590 @ \$3.70/gal.	\$2,130 @ \$3.70/gal.
SAFETY					
CRASH TESTS					
IIHS moderate/small-overlap frontal	Good/Marginal	Good/Marginal	Good/NA	Good/NA	Good/NA
IIHS side	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS rear	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS roof strength	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
NHTSA front, driver/passenger	⬤/⬤	NA/NA	⬤/⬤	NA/NA	NA/NA
NHTSA side, driver/rear	NA/NA	NA/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./no	std./no	std./no	std./no
Head protection	standard	standard	standard	standard	std. w/rollover
SPECIFICATIONS					
DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT					
Length/width/height, in.	182/70/57	183/70/57	160/68/57	144/64/59	178/74/67
Wheelbase, in.	104	106	98	91	109
Turning circle, ft.	37	37	37	39	39
Ground clearance, in.	5.0	6.0	5.0	3.5	7.5
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	3,130 (59/41)	2,900 (61/39)	2,775 (60/40)	2,565 (64/36)	4,200 (52/48)
Maximum load, lb.	1,080	865	825	700	905
Luggage, suitcases+duffles/cargo volume, cu. ft.	3+1	3+1	1+2	0+3	32.0
Towing capacity, lb.	NR	NR	NR	NR	3,500
INTERIOR ROOM					
Front shoulder room, in.	54.5	54.0	52.0	48.5	54.0
Front leg room, in.	43.0	41.5	40.5	41.0	42.5
Front head room, in. ^②	4.0	3.0	3.5	3.0	4.0
Rear shoulder room, in.	53.0	53.0	48.0	46.5	54.0
Rear leg room, in.	30.5	29.0	25.0	22.0	25.5
Rear head room, in. ^②	3.0	1.5	2.0	0.0	5.5

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

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Colorado Springs, CO	KKTV	TV-11	San Francisco, CA	KGO	TV-7
Columbia, SC	WLTX	TV-19	San Juan, Puerto Rico	WAPA	TV-4
Columbus, GA	WRBL	TV-3	Scottsbluff, NE	KDUH	TV-4
Columbus, OH	WCMH	TV-4	Seattle, WA	KOMO	TV-4
Dallas, TX	KXAS	TV-5	Sheridan, WY	KSGW	TV-12
Denver, CO	KUSA/KTVD	TV-9/20	South Bend, IN	WSBT	TV-22
Detroit, MI	WXYZ	TV-7	Springfield, MO	KYTV/KCZ	TV-3/15
El Paso, TX	KFOX	TV-14	St. Thomas, USVI	USVI	TV-2
Eugene, OR	KEZI	TV-9	Syracuse, NY	WSYR	TV-9
Fargo, ND	KVLY	TV-11	Tampa, FL	WFTS	TV-28
Fort Myers, FL	WINK	TV-11/5	Tulsa, OK	KJRH	TV-2
Fresno, CA	KFSN	TV-30	Washington, DC	WUSA	TV-9
Greensboro, NC	WFMY	TV-2	Weslaco, TX	KRGV	TV-5
Harrisburg, PA	WHTM	TV-27	Wichita, KS	KWCH	TV-12
Hartford, CT	WVIT	TV-30	Wichita Falls, TX	KFDX	TV-3
Houston, TX	KTRK	TV-13	Wilmington, NC	WILM	TV-10
Huntsville, AL	WAAY	TV-31	Yakima/Pasco, WA	KIMA/KEPR	TV-29/19
Indianapolis, IN	WXIN	TV-59	Youngstown, OH	WFMJ	TV-21
Jacksonville, FL	WJXT	TV-4			
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Omaha, NE	WOWT	TV-6			

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			
false & misleading	Nov 13, 6		
Air conditioners	Jul 13, 53		
Airlines	Jul 13, 17		
Appliances			
over-the-top countertop	Mar 13, 40		
repairs	Aug 13, 40		
Apps, automotive	Mar 13, 51		
Arsenic, federal guidelines	May 13, 14; Oct 13, 15; Dec 13, 6		
AUTOMOBILE RATINGS:			
Acura MDX	Oct 13, 53		
Acura RLX	Sep 13, 52		
Audi TT	Jun 13, 52		
BMW X1	May 13, 50		
BMW Z4	Jun 13, 52		
Buick Encore	Aug 13, 52		
Cadillac ATS	May 13, 50		
Chevrolet Cruze Turbo Diesel	Oct 13, 53		
Chevrolet Equinox	Aug 13, 52		
Chevrolet Impala	Sep 13, 52		
Chevrolet Malibu	Feb 13, 50		
Chevrolet Silverado 1500	Nov 13, 58		
Fiat 500 Abarth	Jan 14, 52		
Fiat 500L	Dec 13, 67		
Ford C-Max Hybrid	Mar 13, 52		
Ford Fiesta ST	Jan 14, 52		
Ford Focus Electric	Mar 13, 56		
Ford Focus ST	Nov 13, 58		
Ford Fusion SE	Mar 13, 52		
Ford Fusion SE Hybrid	Mar 13, 52		
Ford Fusion Titanium	Mar 13, 52		
Honda Accord EX-L	Feb 13, 50		
Honda Accord LX	Feb 13, 50		
Honda Civic	May 13, 50		
Honda Crosstour	Nov 13, 58		
Honda Odyssey	Nov 13, 58		
Hyundai Santa Fe	Feb 13, 50; Sep 13, 52		
Infiniti Q50	Dec 13, 67		
Jaguar XF	Sep 13, 52		
Jeep Grand Cherokee	Aug 13, 52		
Kia Cadenza	Oct 13, 53		
Kia Forte	Sep 13, 52		
Kia Sorento	Aug 13, 52		
Lexus IS 250	Dec 13, 67		
Lincoln MKZ	Jul 13, 56		
Mazda6	Jun 13, 52		
Mazda CX-5	Jun 13, 52		
Mercedes-Benz GL350 Bluetec	Oct 13, 53		
Mercedes-Benz GLK	Jan 14, 52		
Mercedes-Benz SLK	Jun 13, 52		
Mitsubishi i-MiEV	Mar 13, 56		
Mitsubishi Outlander	Oct 13, 53		
Nissan Pathfinder	May 13, 50		
Nissan Sentra	May 13, 50		
Nissan Versa Note	Dec 13, 67		
Porsche Boxster	Jun 13, 52		
Ram 1500	Nov 13, 58		
Subaru Forester	Jul 13, 56		
Subaru Legacy	Feb 13, 50		
Subaru XV Crosstrek	Feb 13, 50		
Tesla Model S	Jul 13, 56		
Toyota Avalon	Jul 13, 56		
Toyota Corolla	Jan 14, 52		
Toyota Prius Plug-in	Aug 13, 52		
Toyota RAV4	Jun 13, 52		
Volkswagen Jetta	Jan 14, 52		
Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid	Aug 13, 52		
AUTOMOBILES AND AUTOMOTIVE EQUIPMENT:			
accident reporting	Sep 13, 15		
backup cameras, DOT lawsuit	Jan 14, 6		
batteries	Jul 13, 52; Nov 13, 54		
best & worst for 2013	Apr 13, 5		
Bluetooth kits	May 13, 49		
buying tips	Apr 13, 22		
crash-test results			
changed recommendations from	Dec 13, 16		
dashboard distractions	Sep 13, 6		
fatalities, preventing	Oct 13, 48		
flat-tire kits	Jan 14, 49		
fuel economy			
inaccurate claims	Aug 13, 50		
speed and	Aug 13, 8		
standards	Aug 13, 6		
GM recall	Sep 13, 16		
insurance	Jun 13, 25		
Jeep voluntary recall	Sep 13, 16		
key replacement	Jul 13, 55		
manufacturers	Apr 13, 15		
model year 2013 review	Oct 13, 46		
music	Apr 13, 18		
names	Oct 13, 7		
new for 2013	Apr 13, 13		
new for 2014	Oct 13, 43		
owner satisfaction	Jan 14, 50		
profiles, 2013	Apr 13, 40		
Ratings, 2013	Apr 13, 26		
reliability	Apr 13, 86; Dec 13, 60		
rental, saving on	Jan 14, 10		
repair satisfaction	Aug 13, 49		
safety equipment	Nov 13, 49		
safety ratings	Apr 13, 72		
safety trends	Oct 13, 6		
tires	Apr 13, 24		
high- and ultra-high-performance	Nov 13, 50		
top picks for 2013	Apr 13, 10		
used cars	Apr 13, 80		
common problems	Apr 13, 78		
flood-damaged	Feb 13, 49		
winter preparation	Dec 13, 10		
B			
Bacon	Nov 13, 8		
Banks & financial institutions			
small	Nov 13, 12		
switching	Jan 14, 6		
Batteries	Jan 14, 7		
Beef			
safety	Jun 13, 17		
Beer, craft	Aug 13, 10		
Best products of 2013	Nov 13, 15; Jan 14, 5		
Bison meat	Aug 13, 11		
Blenders	May 13, 46; Sep 13, 50		
Calphalon XL 9 Speed, safety risk	Oct 13, 15		
Blood glucose monitors	Nov 13, 43		
Blood pressure monitors	Jun 13, 44		
Breakfast makers	Aug 13, 9		
Broth & stock, chicken	Nov 13, 10		
C			
Cameras			
cleaning	Jul 13, 51		
digital	Aug 13, 26; Dec 13, 39		
Cancer screening	Mar 13, 28; May 13, 5		
Carpet cleaners, Stream Clean	Dec 13, 8		
Cereals	Sep 13, 18		
Chain saws	Oct 13, 26		
Chemicals, toxic, EPA ban	Sep 13, 6		
Chips and crunchy snacks	Oct 13, 8		
potato & vegetable	Feb 13, 7		
Chocolates	Feb 13, 8		
Cleaning, holiday	Dec 13, 48		
Cleaning robots, Winbot	Jun 13, 9		
Cleaning tools, by object cleaned	Sep 13, 8		
Clothes, storing	Oct 13, 9		
Clothes dryers	Feb 13, 40; Aug 13, 42; Dec 13, 50		
Clothing repair gadgets	Nov 13, 10		
Coffeemakers	Dec 13, 55		
automated French press-style	Jan 14, 41		
single-serving	Mar 13, 11; Sep 13, 48		
Computers	Sep 13, 47; Dec 13, 32		
laptop	Mar 13, 50		
convertible & detachable	Aug 13, 39		
printers	Dec 13, 37		
ink wastage	Aug 13, 40		
software, security	Jun 13, 23		
tablet	Feb 13, 44; Aug 13, 24; Dec 13, 30		
Consumer advocacy	Dec 13, 6		
Consumer advocates			
Diane Birmingham	Jul 13, 6		
Kim Witczak	Jun 13, 6		
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, directorship	Oct 13, 6		
Consumer information, <i>consumerdata.gov</i>	Jun 13, 6		
Consumer Reports			
Food Safety and Sustainability Center	Jun 13, 6		
President Jim Guest	Jan 14, 6		
Consumers International	Aug 13, 6		
Consumers Union			
HealthLawHelper.org	Nov 13, 6		
Cooktops	Jul 13, 36		
Thermador Freedom CIT36XXB	Sep 13, 46		
Cookware, Chinet nonstick paper pans	Oct 13, 11		
Countertops, kitchen	Jul 13, 31		
Credit scores	Jul 13, 15		
free	Jul 13, 6		
D			
Debit cards, municipal, fees	Aug 13, 6		
Diet plans	Feb 13, 26		
Dietary supplements			
glucosamine & chondroitin	Oct 13, 12		
safety	Mar 13, 6; Nov 13, 6		
survey findings	Oct 13, 8		
Dish detergent	Oct 13, 40		
Dishwashers	Feb 13, 39; Jul 13, 46		
Fagor LFA-655S: Don't Buy	Sep 13, 46		
Doctors, alternatives to	Aug 13, 34		
Drugs			
disposal	Oct 13, 10		
saving on	Sep 13, 26		
E			
E-book readers	Dec 13, 44		
Egg-yolk extractor, Pluck	Jul 13, 9		

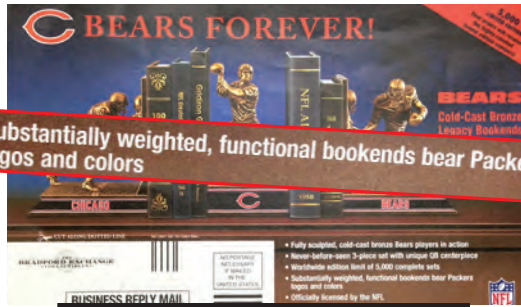
available on our website, at *ConsumerReports.org*. Note that because reports posted on our site are periodically updated, publication dates on the Web index may not reflect when a given report appeared in the magazine.

Electronics			
best brands	Dec 13, 45		
portable	Aug 13, 30		
shopping for	Dec 13, 21		
10 top	Dec 13, 18		
Energy boosts, personal	Sep 13, 14		
Energy conservation	Oct 13, 28		
Exercise equipment	Feb 13, 30		
gadgets	Feb 13, 34; Jun 13, 44		
Eyeglass stores	Aug 13, 31		
F			
Facial tissue	Aug 13, 9		
Financial resolutions	Jan 14, 13		
Flooring	Jul 13, 28		
Food			
canned			
fast, unusual	Sep 13, 7		
frozen, restaurant brands	Sep 13, 11		
labeling	Aug 13, 12		
misleading	Jan 14, 8		
Food and Drug Administration website	Aug 13, 6		
Food processors	Oct 13, 39		
401(k) plans	Sep 13, 22		
G			
Generators	Oct 13, 24		
Gifts	Jan 14, 19		
GPS units	Mar 13, 41; Sep 13, 51		
Grills, gas	Jun 13, 32		
H			
Haggling	Aug 13, 15; Oct 13, 5		
Hair remover, No No	Dec 13, 8		
Ham	Dec 13, 7		
Headphones	Dec 13, 43		
Health			
2013 news	Dec 13, 15		
Health care			
long-term care	Nov 13, 13		
patient-centered	Jul 13, 20		
websites, patient portals	Jan 14, 16		
Health insurance	Nov 13, 34; Dec 13, 5		
reform law	Nov 13, 30		
Health products, questionable claims	Nov 13, 7		
High chairs			
Babyhome Eat: Don't Buy	May 13, 40		
BeBeLove: safety risk	Nov 13, 14		
Hoses, garden	Jun 13, 45		
I			
Ice cream	Jun 13, 8		
Irons	May 13, 41		
J			
Jerky	Mar 13, 10		
Joints, replacement	Dec 13, 6		
K			
Kitchen remodeling	Jul 13, 24		
L			
Labels			
cancer warning, California	Mar 13, 10		
Laundry detergents	Aug 13, 46		
pods, candlely	Aug 13, 48		
Lawn mowers & tractors	May 13, 30		
Leaf blowers	Nov 13, 41		
Lightbulbs	Oct 13, 30; Jan 14, 24		
LED	Feb 13, 38; Jun 13, 45		
M			
Magnetic toys, high-powered, possible ban	Jan 14, 14		
Mattresses	Mar 13, 42		
Meat sticks	Mar 13, 10		
Media & music players	Mar 13, 39		
streaming	Sep 13, 45; Dec 13, 42		
Medical care			
complaints	Jun 13, 11		
concierge	Feb 13, 12		
Money advisers, types	Mar 13, 8		
Money mistakes	Feb 13, 21; Mar 13, 5		
Morning activities	Dec 13, 8		
N			
Nursing homes	Jun 13, 14		
O			
Online privacy, kids'	Oct 13, 6		
P			
Packaging			
deceptive	Jun 13, 12		
problems, long-standing	Oct 13, 10		
smart	Sep 13, 12		
Packing	Dec 13, 9		
Paints & stains			
exterior	Jun 13, 36		
interior	Mar 13, 46		
Paper, FreshPaper fruit & vegetable preserving	Jun 13, 10		
Pasta, Ronzoni quick-cooking	Jul 13, 11		
Pill bottles, oversized	Aug 13, 7		
Pizza, frozen	Sep 13, 10		
Pots, Pauli Never Burn Stock Pot	Dec 13, 9		
Produce safety regulations	Jul 13, 6		
R			
Ranges	Jul 13, 36		
Pro-style	Dec 13, 53		
Refrigerators	Jul 13, 42; Jan 14, 46		
compact	Jun 13, 43		
Fhiaba Series MG Stand Plus	Dec 13, 54		
S			
Savings, high yield	Jun 13, 15		
Scams			
computer-virus warnings, fake	Oct 13, 11		
senior-targeted	Aug 13, 13		
sweepstakes	Jul 13, 8		
Security, vacation	Jun 13, 10		
Shopping			
grocery survey	Sep 13, 9		
online	Dec 13, 14		
safety	Dec 13, 59		
Snack bars	Jul 13, 13		
Snacks, mall	Dec 13, 10		
Snow blowers	Feb 13, 37		
Soup, chicken noodle	Jan 14, 9		
Speakers			
sound bars	Feb 13, 38		
wireless	Jan 14, 42		
Store brands	Oct 13, 16		
Stores			
appliance	Jul 13, 34		
Best Buy	Jun 13, 8		
sporting goods	Jun 13, 39		
Storms	Oct 13, 21		
checklist	Jul 13, 7		
Strollers			
iCandy Cherry & Mutys Evo, unsafe	Mar 13, 13		
Truly Scrumptious Travel System, unsafe	Dec 13, 16		
Sunscreens	Jul 13, 10		
Surgery	Sep 13, 31		
Sweeteners, Nectresse	Jun 13, 10		
T			
Tea tumblers, Teavana, recall	Aug 13, 14		
Technical support	Jun 13, 7		
Telecommunications services, bundled	May 13, 20		
Telephone services			
cellular	Jan 14, 26		
cutting costs	Jan 14, 36		
Lifetime low-income support service	Sep 13, 6		
Telephones			
cellular, charging pads	Jan 14, 8		
cordless	Dec 13, 56		
smart	Aug 13, 22; Dec 13, 26; Jan 14, 26; Jan 14, 32		
Samsung Galaxy S 4	Jul 13, 51		</



Who's thirsty?

These water bottles were in a Michigan hotel. The one on the left was free. The one on the right? An eagle-eyed guest found the answer. "I'd call that sneaky," he writes.



Let's go Bearpackers!

Unless Chicago changed its colors to green and gold while we weren't looking, someone dropped the ball.



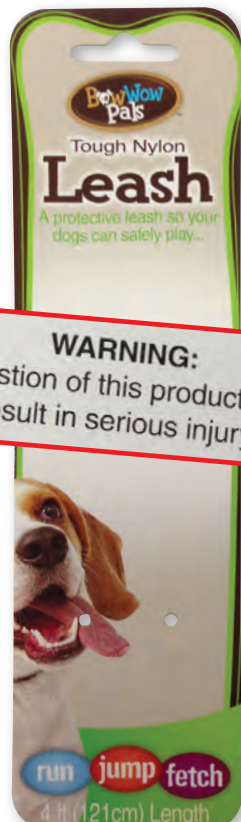
Food fight!

Call us crazy, but we don't understand how a kick to a sensitive area would help sell tortilla chips. A translation of the Japanese on the label ("electricity stomp returns") doesn't help, either.



Hope you like mustard

Gulden's squeeze jar has a bigger opening than before. "Controlling the flow," a reader said, "is almost impossible."



Canine caution

OK, how many of you used to think that swallowing a dog leash was a good idea? (The product also warns not to leash kids—that's children, not goats.)



Plants for sale (plus house)

"I can see trouble," a reader predicts, "when it's time to move in."



An overdose of idiocy

A company called Kitson has been selling these T-shirts, saying "Pop one on and you'll feel better." But several attorneys general and makers of the drugs don't feel good about the pitch.

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Canada Extra

Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

In this special section

Light vacuums	32A
Refrigerators	32B
Smart phones	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.

Light vacuums Report and Ratings, page 43

Recommended models only, from 21 tested.

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rec.	Rank			<div><div></div><div>0100</div><div>P F G VG E</div></div>

A HAND VACS These are best for spot-cleaning small spaces.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Shark Pet Perfect Two	\$100	79
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Eureka Easy Clean 71B	50	71
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Bissell Pet Hair Eraser 33A1 <small>ⓘ</small>	60	65

		Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Rec.	Rank			<div><div></div><div>0100</div><div>P F G VG E</div></div>

B STICK VAC This cordless vac is fine for short-pile carpets and floors.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Hoover Platinum Linx BH50010	\$210	69
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ⓘ Lacks an electric-powered brush head.

Refrigerators

Report, page 46; Ratings, pages 47-48

Recommended models only, from 283 tested.

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

A TOP-FREEZERS

✓	1	GE Profile PTS22LHS[WW]	\$1,400	69
✓	2	Whirlpool WRT771REV[W]	1,200	67
✓	4	Haier HT21TS77SP	700	63

B CONVENTIONAL BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	Whirlpool Gold GB2FHDW[Q]	1,400	73
✓	2	Amana ABB2224WEW	1,000	73
✓	3	Maytag MBF2258XE[W]	1,300	73
✓	4	Maytag MBF1958XE[W]	1,200	72

C FOUR-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	1	Samsung T9000	4,200	83
✓	2	Samsung RF31FMEBSR	3,400	79

D THREE-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS

✓	2	Samsung RF261BIAESR	2,100	84
✓	5	LG LFX33975ST	3,500	83
✓	6	Whirlpool Gold GX5FHTXV[Q]	1,800	82
✓	7	Samsung RFG297HDRS	2,800	81

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

D THREE-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR BOTTOM-FREEZERS continued

✓	8	LG LFC25776[SW]	\$1,900	81
✓	9	Samsung RF323TEDB[SR]	3,700	80
✓	10	Kenmore Elite 7103[2]	2,700	79
✓	11	LG LFX31925[ST]	3,600	79

E SIDE-BY-SIDES

✓	1	Samsung RS265TD[WP]	1,500	76
✓	2	Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S] ①	3,000	74
✓	4	DCS RX215PJX1 ①	NA	73

F BUILT-INS

✓	1	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS	NA	80
✓	2	Jenn-Air JS42PPDUB[SS]	NA	80
✓	3	Bosch Integra 800 Series B36BT830NS	NA	78
✓	4	Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT810NS	NA	78
✓	5	Thermador KBUDT4265E[S]	NA	77
✓	6	Sub-Zero BI42S[S]	NA	76
✓	7	Miele KF1901Vi	NA	76

① Cabinet-depth.

Smart phones

Report, page 32; Ratings, pages 34-35

Here are recommended and rated smart phones that are available in Canada, listed by their Canadian carrier. Performance and features might vary from tested models. Prices are for a two-year contract.

Bell Mobility

- ✓ BlackBerry Z10, \$0
- ✓ HTC One (32GB), \$150
- ✓ LG G2, \$150
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Mega, \$100
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (32GB), \$300
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB), \$180
- ✓ Sony Xperia Z, \$50

Rogers Wireless

- ✓ Apple iPhone 5c (16GB), \$130
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5s (16GB), \$230
- ✓ BlackBerry Z10, \$0
- ✓ HTC One (32GB), \$150
- ✓ HTC Windows Phone 8X (16GB), \$30
- ✓ LG G2, \$150
- ✓ LG Optimus G, \$150
- ✓ Motorola Moto X (16GB), \$150
- ✓ Nokia Lumia 1020, \$200
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Mega, \$100
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (32GB), \$300
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB), \$180

Telus Mobility

- ✓ Apple iPhone 5c (16GB), \$130
- ✓ Apple iPhone 5s (16GB), \$230
- ✓ BlackBerry Z10, \$0
- ✓ Google Nexus 4 (16GB), \$30
- ✓ HTC One (32GB), \$150
- ✓ LG G2, \$150
- ✓ Nokia Lumia 1020, \$200
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Mega, \$100
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (32GB), \$300
- ✓ Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB), \$180

Recalls

2011-2012 Chevrolet Cruze

During the manufacturing process, welds may have been omitted from the fuel-tank mounting brackets. Fuel leakage may occur in the case of a severe side-impact crash.

Models 8,185 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer inspect and, if necessary, secure the fuel-tank brackets using fasteners.

2009-2012 Subaru Forester

When used in the automatic locking mode, the center-rear seat belt may hinder proper installation of a child safety seat. The seat belt would lock if a crash occurred, but the belt may loosen and the child seat may shift or be improperly positioned.

Models 35,585 vehicles.

What to do Subaru will send owners a supplement to their driver's manual and a locking clip with instructions on how to use it. Dealers will replace the center seat-belt retractor upon request.

2012 Audi Q5

The front sunroof may have been manufactured incorrectly. During severely cold weather conditions, it may fail. The sunroof glass panel may break while the vehicle is in motion, causing a distraction or resulting in a crash.

Models 1,793 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace the front sunroof glass panel.

2010 Lexus models

The accelerator pedal may stick in the wide-open position if the driver's floor mat is unsecured or incompatible. At high speeds, a fully depressed accelerator pedal may make it difficult to slow or stop the vehicle.

Models 14,478 Lexus RX 350 and Lexus RX 450H vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer modify or replace the accelerator pedal.

2013 Ford Escape

Carpet padding in the driver's foot area may have been incorrectly installed during assembly. The carpet and center-console trim panel may be slightly closer to the accelerator. The driver may then shift his foot to the left of the designed position and may inadvertently contact the side of the brake pedal. That may cause a delay in the brake application, resulting in a crash.

Models 2,193 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer remove the carpet padding and replace the left-side console trim panel.

2012-2013 Honda models

If the door lock is activated while the interior front-door handle is being opened, the cable connecting the door handle to the door latch may become loose. That may result in the door not latching properly.

Models 21, 729 2012 Honda CR-V and 2013 Acura ILX vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace the front-door latch assemblies. Also, the interior front-door handles will be replaced on certain 2012 CR-V vehicles.

2012-2013 Hyundai Sonata

Due to a defect in the manufacturing of the inflator module, the side curtain air bags may deploy without warning.

Models 1,925 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace the affected side curtain air bags.

2004-2008 BMW 7 Series

Vehicles equipped with the Comfort Access option may malfunction if the driver depresses the start/stop button several times in rapid succession. The transmission may shift to neutral instead of park. If the vehicle is not in park and is on a slope, it may roll away.

Models 2,087 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer reprogram the Central Gateway Control Module with updated software.

2013 Nissan Altima

The power-steering rack bolts and four traverse link bolts may not have been properly tightened during vehicle assembly. If one of those bolts loosens and falls out, the driver may lose control of the vehicle, resulting in a crash.

Models 1,058 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer tighten the affected bolts to the specified torque.

2007-2009 Toyota models

Due to improperly applied grease, the driver's-side power-window master switch could stick or become inoperative. If the switch is lubricated, the switch assembly could overheat and melt. If the switch melts, it may produce smoke and result in a fire.

Models 239,459 2007-2009 Camry, 2007-2009 Camry HV, 2009 Corolla, 2008 Highlander, 2008 Highlander HV, 2009 Matrix, 2007-2009 RAV4, 2008-2009 Sequoia, 2007-2009 Tundra, and 2007-2008 Yaris vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer inspect the driver's power-window master switch and apply a specialized grease that inhibits heat buildup, or replace the power-window master switch circuit board, if necessary.

2011-2013 Ford Fiesta

The Restraint Control Module will turn off the right side curtain air bag along with the front-passenger seat-mounted side air bag when the Occupant Classification System (OCS) senses that the right front seat is not occupied. The vehicle meets the standards for side-impact protection, but the failure of the curtain air bag to deploy could increase the risk of injury to the right-rear occupant.

Models 27,967 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer reprogram the Restraint Control Module.

2003-2007 Honda Accord

If exposed to prolonged high heat, the power-steering hose could crack and leak power-steering fluid. Hot leaking fluid dripping onto a hot surface may potentially cause smoke and result in a fire.

Models 29,947 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace the power-steering hose.

2005, 2006, and 2008 General Motors models

The power-steering assist may malfunction at any time. If that occurs, a message will be displayed and a chime will sound to alert the driver. The steering can be controlled and maintained as the vehicle reverts to the manual-steering mode, but greater driver effort is required at lower speeds. The loss of the power-steering assist may increase the risk of a crash.

Models 67,414 2008 Saturn Aura; 2005, 2006, and 2008 Pontiac G6; 2005, 2006, and 2008 Chevrolet Malibu; and 2005, 2006, and 2008 Chevrolet Malibu Maxx vehicles.

What to do For 2005 and 2006 vehicles, the dealer will replace the steering column. For 2008 vehicles, the dealer will replace the power-steering motor control module.

2013 Infiniti JX35

The fuel transfer tube inside the fuel tank may be misrouted. The gauge may indicate a higher-than-authentic level in the fuel tank, possibly causing the vehicle to run out of fuel without notice.

Models 1,116 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer inspect the fuel transfer tube and reroute it, if necessary.

2011-2012 Mercedes-Benz ML-Class

The all-season floor mats may interfere with the accelerator pedal when the pedal is fully depressed, causing a delayed retraction of the pedal. That could increase the risk of a crash.

Models 4,296 vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer replace the all-season floor mats with an updated design.

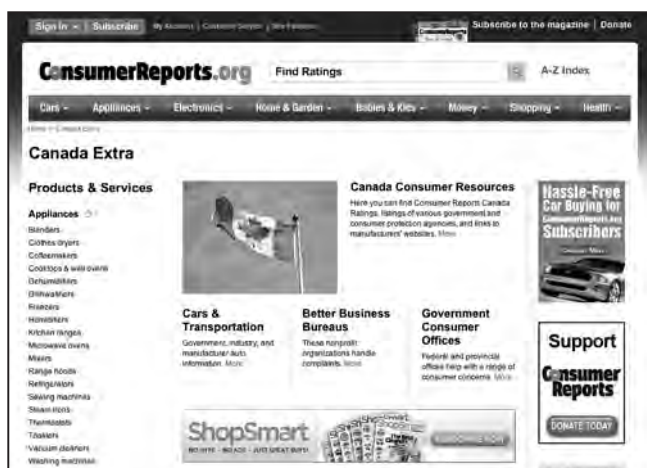
Autos Report and Ratings, pages 52-59

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

Make & model	Price range	Acceleration (sec.)				Fuel economy (liters per 100 km)		
		0-50 km/h	0-100 km/h	80-100 km/h	500 meters	City driving	Highway driving	Overall
COMPACT SEDANS								
Volkswagen Jetta	\$14,990-\$34,025	3.4	9.0	3.8	18.9	11.2	6.0	8.0
Toyota Corolla	15,995-22,200	4.2	10.4	4.1	20.2	10.3	5.5	7.3
SPORTY HATCHBACKS								
Ford Fiesta ST	14,499-24,999	3.1	7.7	3.0	17.8	11.0	6.5	8.2
Fiat 500 Abarth	15,995-27,995	2.7	8.5	2.4	18.6	10.9	6.9	8.4
LUXURY COMPACT SUV								
Mercedes-Benz GLK350	43,500-45,500	2.5	6.5	3.5	16.9	16.4	8.2	11.3

Canada Extra on the Web

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Contact info How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

Amana
800-843-0304
amana.com

GE
888-261-2088
geappliances.ca

LG
888-542-2623
lg.ca

Sub-Zero
800-222-8220
subzero.com

Bissell
800-263-2535
canada.bissell.com

Haier
888-764-2437
haieramerica.com

Maytag
800-688-2002
maytag.ca

Thermador
800-735-4328
thermador.com

Bosch
866-442-6986
boschappliances.com

Hoover
800-944-9200
hoover.ca

Miele
800-643-5381
miele.ca

Whirlpool
800-807-6777
whirlpoolappliances.ca

DCS
888-936-7872
usa.fisherpaykel.com

Jenn-Air
800-688-2002
jennair.ca

Samsung
800-726-7864
samsung.ca

Eureka
800-282-2886
eureka.com

Kenmore
Contact local Sears
sears.ca

Shark
800-798-7398
sharkclean.com