CR Consumer Reports

THE GREAT GIFT GUIDE

TOP-RATED PRODUCTS

Tested for performance & safety

- Smartphones
- TVs
- Laptops
- Coffee makers
- Grills
- Earbuds
- Smartwatches
- Video cameras
- Cookware
- Tablets
- Gourmet coffees
- Wireless speakers
- Blenders
- Fitness trackers
- Desktop computers
- Tires
- TV sound bars
- Color printers
- Vacuums
- Headphones
- Toasters & toaster ovens
- Streaming media players
- Electric kettles
- Bike helmets
- and more!

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Smart Charity Choices

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ConsumerReports
The Great Gift Guide of 2016

Spend your holiday shopping dollars wisely by using our list of 104 top-rated products. You'll find something for everyone you love. Along the way, learn the latest on charity choices, gift registries, group giving, and more.

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RATINGS

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RATINGS Overall scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100. We rate products using these symbols:

POOR ❌ FAIR ☹ GOOD ☑️

VERY GOOD ☑️ EXCELLENT ☑️
Could Someone Hijack Your Healthcare?

Medical identity theft—when someone else steals your insurance information in order to get prescription drugs, surgery, or other medical services—has been increasing dramatically. Our in-depth report “Body Snatchers” (October 2016) looked at how much damage this crime can cause and how you can minimize the chance of falling prey to identity-theft predators.

A random number and replace our Medicare ID cards with something more secure than a printed paperboard card.

-Ronald Garney, Cathedral City, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE A bill signed by President Obama in the spring of 2015 requires IRS to issue new Medicare cards that don't display or embed SSNs. However, it's unclear how quickly that will happen. The bill gives IRS four years from April 2015 to make this change for new beneficiaries and an additional four years to get new cards without SSNs to those already using Medicare.

IN YOUR ARTICLE, you alerted readers that Medicare ID cards bear our SSNs. Simply photocopy the card and black out the last 4 digits of the SSN on the copy. That's what I carry in my wallet. The original card is safely locked away. No doctor has refused to accept this "amended" Medicare card. I simply tell them the last four digits whenever they ask.

-Ronald Kitchenman, Southampton, PA

ARTICLES ON MEDICAL fraud keep advising us to keep our private health information out of the reach of hackers and to check every explanation of benefits notice. However, the medical files of the insurers are often hacked—for example, the 2015 Anthem database breach containing nearly 80 million records, including SSNs. Also, notifications of charges are not sent out until months after they are incurred. By then it's too late. When I purchase gas, charge over $100, or have unusual activity on my credit, I receive almost instant notification. So it's clear that

the technology exists to greatly reduce medical fraud.

-Richard Veitch, Longmont, CO

AS A MORE practical alternative, rather than requesting copies of files, patients could use their doctor's "patient portal." Many practices that have converted to electronic medical records now offer patient portals where patients can access most of their own records.

Again, these systems, as with most medical records, are not interconnected, so there will be large holes through which medical fraud can go undetected, but at least the portals allow for frequent monitoring at no cost to the patient or the physician.

-Michael Melgas, M.D., Great Neck, NY

Fear of Flying

In reference to "Secrets to Stress-Free Flying." If grocery stores were run like the airlines, we'd have to pay extra for parking, cart rental, the ability to pick out our own fruits and meats, checking out at lines staffed with a clerk, and choosing paper or plastic bags. Oh, and don't forget the fuel surcharge for their merchandise delivery trucks.

-Paul Walorski, Columbus, IN

Wouldn't it be nice if people didn't have to play these silly games to get a good deal? If airlines all had to charge a reasonable rate and stick to it, flying would be a lot less aggravating.

-William Smith, via Facebook

AS A LONGTIME travel agent, I was surprised that in this 14-page report you never suggested consulting a travel agent. We not only have the same or lower fares as online websites but also have access to real-time availability, unpublished fares, and sold-out flights. Our service is included in the cost of the ticket, and many find it invaluable when things go unexpectedly. To our clients, spending hours
and days engaging in complex online searches, as your writer recommends, seems the old-fashioned way to book travel.
-Mike Galadari, West Hollywood, CA

YOUR STORY REALLY resonated with me. I no longer care to fly on American-flagged airlines, owing to the deterioration of customer service, particularly regarding seat size (although I am not a large person), and the lack of decent food service. A few years back, I was moved to undertake a wee bit of research regarding seat size, and that discovered from this is that if you have to fly coach, you're better off dead.
-Ralph McCaskill, San Pablo, CA

IF YOU WANT to fly stress-free, get a second job and go business class.
-Frank Heppner, Wakefield, RI

The Future of Cars
IN "THE PROMISE of a Post- Driver Life," Edward Humes predicts we will have "autonomous transport" within the next 20 years or so. He correctly points out that "driving is a primary cause of fatal car crashes." Why don't we make improvements that will help reduce the carnage now? Our driver education courses cover only the very basics of driving, and are often the only driving training motorists ever receive. I distrust vehicles that are "safer" than the driver. How many motorists do you see at night with no headlights on, because they think the automatic feature did it for them? My view is that people need more training, not just more gadgets.
-Gregory Schneckpaper, Tinley Park, IL

ACCORDING to Edward Humes' editorial in the October issue, by 2036 "driving alone in a car for a long distance will be viewed as a shockingly wasteful historical absurdity." Call me a relic or a romantic, but I think it's a pity that future generations won't get to experience the pleasures and joys of a real road trip, surely one of America's greatest pastimes.
-James Toth, Richmond, VA

Power Doors
REGARDING your article on generators ("Power Plays"); I'd like to remind your readers that the automatic garage door opener won't work during a power outage. If you can't get the door open manually (I couldn't lift my unbalanced, heavy door) you can't drive to where there is power. And if you want to charge your cell phone or laptop from your car charger, it is dangerous to run the car unless the garage door is open.
-Nicola Nelson, North Salt Lake, UT

EDITOR'S NOTE: Great reminder about automatic garage door openers from this savvy reader! There's just one more thing we'd like to raise on this topic: It's not enough to simply leave the garage door open when you're running the car in the garage. For safety's sake, be sure to fully pull the car out into the open air first.

Clarification
In the article "Your Burning Questions, Answered" (July 2016), we included a rating of the BabyGanics Mineral-Based SPF 50. We have since been notified by the company that the version we included was an older formulation no longer on the market. We plan to retest the new formulation as part of our ongoing sunscreen coverage.

CLOTHES WASHERS: GE is recalling about 222,000 top-loading GE Profile washing machines. They contain an electrical component that can overheat, posing a fire hazard.
What to do: Unplug the washer and contact GE Appliances at 877-830-9732 or go to geappliances.com and click on "Recall Information" for a free repair.

SAMSUNG GALAXY NOTE? In mid-September, Samsung and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) announced an official recall of about 1 million Galaxy Note? smartphones—two weeks after Consumer Reports called for just such an action—based on multiple reports of the phone catching fire due to defective batteries. The recall covers 97 percent of Note5's sold in the U.S. since the phone's mid-August launch.
What to do: To determine if your phone has been recalled, locate the IMEI number on the packaging or by checking in the phone's settings (it's also printed on the back of the phone), and call Samsung toll-free at 844-369-8107 or go to samsung.com for details on getting a refund. Though Samsung is also offering a replacement Note phone, at press time, the government and Samsung were investigating a report that one of these replacement phones caught fire on a recent domestic flight.

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DECEMBER 2016
Building a Better World, Together

Join with us to make a safer, healthier marketplace.

Antibiotics

Exit the Menu

The fast-food industry has historically been slow to change its ways, particularly when profits are involved. But on one issue, it seems that more chains are now responding to pressure from consumers. These restaurants are moving to keep unnecessary antibiotics out of the production of the billions of pounds of beef, chicken, turkey, and pork that the industry serves every year. According to a new joint investigation by several health and environmental organizations— including Consumers Union, the policy and mobilization arm of Consumer Reports—nine of the top 25 fast-food restaurants have publicly committed to significantly limiting their use of the drugs (up from five chains in 2015).

The report, which grades the chains on their antibiotic policies and practices, found that Panera and Chipotle lead the pack with A grades; almost all the meat they serve—beef, chicken, pork, and turkey—is raised without the routine use of antibiotics. Subway might rate a “most improved.” Last year it got an F; this year, a B. It says that by the end of 2016 all of its chicken will be raised without antibiotics. But KFC, Burger King, and 14 other chains received failing grades. Antibiotics are frequently used to help fatten livestock and keep the animals healthy in crowded, unsanitary conditions. But overuse contributes to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, which infect an estimated 2 million people in the U.S. each year, of whom roughly 23,000 die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Antibiotics are a growing public health concern, and we encourage consumers to support restaurants that make a commitment to reducing their use of these drugs,” said Dr. Clair Vanderhoof, chief medical officer of Consumer Reports.

Minding Our Medical Bills

Within the last two years, almost one in four privately insured Californians received a medical bill only to discover that his or her health plan paid less than expected, according to a 2015 Consumer Reports survey of 2,500 privately insured California residents. Among these patients, almost one in four was charged an out-of-network rate for healthcare even though he or she had thought a provider was in-network, an all-too-common scenario as more and more medical specialists are declining to enter into contracts with health insurers.

But although unwise practices like those continue to plague patients nationwide, Californians can now recover from the ailments without the worry. That’s because the Golden State recently enacted a law that ensures that its residents will pay only in-network prices when receiving treatment at in-network hospitals, labs, imaging centers, and other healthcare facilities. California already had those consumer protections in place for emergency care. Consumer Reports strongly supported the California law and worked with legislators to share stories of Californians hit with such unfair bills. We also helped to generate calls, emails, and social media outreach to lawmakers.

“This bill is a victory for the millions of Californians who will be protected from surprise medical bills,” said Betsy Imholz, special projects director at Consumers Union. In fact, our advocates are working in several states to help push for similar legislation and were strong proponents of a law recently passed in Florida that also strengthens patient protections. Go to EndSurpriseMedicalBills.org to learn more about our campaign to safeguard your rights in this area.

Pushing Back on Bad Banks

Our financial system lost a lot of credit with the public in 2008, and so far it doesn’t seem to be too concerned about improving its reputation. Comparing the months of May through July of this year with the same period in 2015, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has seen consumer complaints involving bank accounts and services spike 26 percent. A majority of the complaints are about problems with checking accounts, including overdraft fees and inaccuracies in credit reports—concerns that we at Consumer Reports have raised for years.

The CFPB’s complaint database is a crucial tool that helps track and tackle troubling trends. If you find that you’re experiencing a problem like those mentioned with your own banking services, we encourage you to report the problem at cfpb.gov/complaint.
Product Updates
The latest ratings from our labs

This Winter, Be Ready for Anything

Don't let a blizzard—or a wobbly piece of luggage—slow you down this season. Our ratings and expert advice give you all the intel you need to make snow blowing a breeze, and then to blow out of town with new luggage in tow.
Product Updates

LET IT BLOW
A new design pumps up the power of snow blowers.
by Daniel DiClerico

RAISE YOUR FROSTBITTEN hand if you like clearing snow. We thought not. Happily, the newest breed of snow blower tackles that woeful winter chore up to 30 percent faster. Known as "three stage" snow blowers, you can hardly miss them in our ratings. They've stormed to the top.

"We think of these as two-stage blowers on steroids," says Peter Sawchuk, our outdoor-power-equipment guru.

"The faster push comes from the addition of an accelerator." Sawchuk is referring to a third auger, which corkscrews into drifts and zips snow, ice, and slush into the discharge impeller to be jettisoned out of your path.

Two-stage blowers have the collection augers and impeller but don't have the accelerator, and single-stage models rely solely on a quick-turning auger.

The reigning champ for value and performance among three-stagers in our tests is the Troy-Bilt Vortex 2890, $1,300 at Lowe's. The 28-inch-wide machine clears heavy 2-foot drifts with ease. Spending more on the Cub Cadet 3X 30HD, $1,600, gets you a wider, 30-inch clearing deck—better for long driveways. Power steering and single-hand controls make for superb handling on both models, earning them excellent marks in those categories.

Not everyone needs a three-stage model, but if you get a lot of wet, heavy snow or have a large area to clear, you'll want to consider one. What's a lot of snow? See our ratings on the facing page for snowfall-specific recommendations. If you live outside the snow belt but still get the occasional dump, a two-stage blower should suffice. The Craftsman 88694 delivers excellent performance for $900. For lighter snow, the single-stage Toro Power Clear 721E, $570, impressed us with its speed and handling, though its throwing distance was merely so-so.

But with the money you save, you can always hire the neighborhood shovel crew in a pinch.
### Ratings

Get the drift: Snow blowers that are up to the task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation Rank</th>
<th>Brand &amp; Model</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Overall Score</th>
<th>Test Results</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cub Cadet 3X 3000H</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Craftsman 66836</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Ariens AX254 921030</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Troy-Bilt Storm 3090</td>
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<td>44</td>
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<td>Troy-Bilt Vortex 2490</td>
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<td>Troy-Bilt Storm 2840</td>
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#### HEAVY SNOWFALL (12 to 24 inches)

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<th>Recommendation Rank</th>
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<td>3-Stage</td>
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#### MEDIUM SNOWFALL (8 to 12 inches)

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<th>Features</th>
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<td>4 (1-8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Honda HS720A3</td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4 (1-8)</td>
<td>3-Stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### LIGHT SNOWFALL (Less than 8 inches)

**HOW WE TESTED:** Score is mainly removal speed, blow-out removal, throwing distance, surface cleaning, controls, and handling. We've rounded displayed scores and ranked models in order of precision overall score. Removal Speed is how quickly and smoothly a model cleared an area; we pushed single-stage machines as quickly as possible before they sounded as though they were stalling. Flow-Flow Removal is how fast the snow blower can remove snow-simulating wet sawdust piled like snow plowed to the edge of a driveway; we check test in real dense snow piles. Throwing Distance is how far a snow blower hurled snow straight ahead, left, and right with its chute set for maximum distance; lengths range from roughly 10 feet to more than 30 feet (the farther the better). Surface Cleaning is how little snow is left on a blacktop surface with the machine set for best cleaning (a bare surface is best). Controls includes handle comfort and ease of adjusting handle height, discharge chute, engine controls, and ground speed. Handling is how easy it is to push, pull, and steer with the engine or motor on and off, along with how straight the unit tracks. Price is approximate retail.
AHEAD OF THE PACK

Our buying advice and reader-satisfaction scores will make shopping for your next suitcase an open-and-shut case.

by Susan Feinstein

WHILE SHOPPING for a new suitcase, you can quickly find yourself foggy about the things that matter most. We've researched the features that go into making a reliable and user-friendly suitcase and are here to clear the air: When shopping for luggage, the important considerations are material, measurements, wheels, and durability. That advice, combined with reader-satisfaction scores and feedback from our recent survey of 65,000 Consumer Reports subscribers, will help guide you to the suitcase that's best for you.

BUYING BASICS

Choose a Side
Though bags come in countless shapes and sizes, luggage can generally be divided into two basic categories: hard-sided and soft-sided. Each has its advantages.

Hard-sided bags were the standard until the 1990s, when soft-sided luggage pulled ahead in popularity, according to Michele Marini Pittenger, president of the Travel Goods Association, a trade group. Some advantages: Soft-sided bags are lighter and can also flex and compress to more easily fit into the snug spaces of the overhead bin in an airplane.

Soft-sided bags are usually made of nylon or polyester fabric. An easy way to determine the quality of the material is to subject a bag to a sniff test, says Bernard Majeau, director of product development at eBags, an online luggage retailer. A strong or offensive odor suggests that the bag is made from a low-grade polyester.

For nylon and polyester bags, Majeau says to check the denier, a measure of the material's thickness. There should be a manufacturer's tag on the luggage with a number followed by the letter D. A common denier rating is 600D, though the number can go much higher. In general, the higher the number, the more wear and tear it can handle.

To keep fragile items from being crushed or your clothes from being creased, nothing beats hard-sided, or hard-shell, suitcases. They're making a comeback, thanks to new materials that are rigid and lightweight. Of the 27,000 people who rated their suitcase in our recent subscriber survey, 21 percent said they chose hard-sided luggage for their mid-sized and large pieces, and 14 percent chose it for their carry-on pieces.

Most hard-shell luggage is made with modern plastics, such as polypropylene, ABS, or polycarbonate. According to Majeau, polypropylene and polycarbonate are more flexible and ABS is more rigid. Aluminum luggage is probably the most durable and secure—it often features metal draw-bolt latches instead of zippers—but aluminum bags can also be comparatively heavy.

Another advantage of hard-sided luggage is that you can't overstuff it to bulging, so as long as you buy the right size, it'll fit in the luggage sizers at the gate. Hard-sided luggage might also be more secure because it can't be ripped open as easily and the locks are usually built in vs. having an external padlock.

Still, hard luggage is not without potential drawbacks. For instance, some suitcases open like a clamshell, which allows you to pack two equal sides but also takes up more space.
when the bag is open than many soft-sided bags, which have a flap closure that unzips and flips over the side. Hard-sided bags can also scuff and scratch more easily than soft-sided, and if you crack one, you can pretty much forget about repairing it.

**Determine Durability**
Once you’ve settled on hard or soft, it’s time to deal with the overall durability of the bag. Our survey shows that durability is the single greatest predictor of overall satisfaction with luggage: Among the readers who rated their suitcases, 61 percent said that durability was among the three most important factors when choosing carry-on, midsize, or large luggage. How do you judge a bag’s durability?

**ZERO IN ON ZIPPERS.** Majeau says that most pieces of luggage come with a coil zipper, which is usually made of polyester and differs from the metal tooth zipper found on, say, a pair of jeans. Majeau says that the larger the zipper, the stronger it is likely to be.

**HOST THE HANDLE.** Handles take a lot of abuse as bags are pulled up and down curbs and yanked mercilessly by bellhops and airline baggage workers. Make sure your handle is built to last: It should feel solid and sturdy, and not wiggle or rattle as you pull. It should also telescope smoothly up and down. Note that a handle that retracts completely into the bag is less likely to sustain damage.

**WADE INTO THE WARRANTY.** A lifetime warranty for repair or replacement is, of course, the best option and a good indication that the manufacturer stands behind a bag’s durability. But make sure to check for exclusions and to read the fine print. Certain manufacturers will cover damage caused by an airline, for instance; others won’t. And most won’t cover normal wear and tear.

**Deal With The Wheels**
A majority of our survey respondents said that the ease of wheeling a bag was among the three most important requirements when choosing carry-on, midsize, or large luggage.

When it comes to wheels, the first decision you’ll need to make is whether you want two or four.

**Four-Wheeled Suitcases, Also Called Spinner Suitcases, Are More Versatile and Ergonomic.** You can easily wheel a spinner at your side or in front of you, or pull it behind you without putting much stress on your back or shoulders. Spinners are a cinch to navigate down narrow airplane aisles and through other tight spaces, but you need to keep an eye on them: Because a spinner doesn’t have stationary legs, it can roll away when it’s placed on an incline. The wheels on spinner suitcases are mounted externally, which could leave them vulnerable to snapping off if they’re subjected to rough handling.

A two-wheeler, on the other hand, rolls only forward and backward. It’s less ergonomic because you have to drag it behind you, which could irritate your shoulder, wrist, or back. It can also be awkward to navigate in crowded places because you need some clearance between yourself and the bag (unlike spinners, which can be wheeled directly at your side). But two-wheeler suitcases usually have the advantage over four-wheeler suitcases; clear curbs and rolling on sidewalks and uneven surfaces—something you should keep in mind if you plan to spend a lot of time on the cobblestone streets of Europe.

A two-wheeler will also stay put on an incline and might be easier to fit into the overhead compartment because its wheels are slightly recessed.

A wobbly suitcase will slow you down, so pull any bag you’re considering buying around the showoom to make sure that the wheels roll smoothly. Gently jiggle them to determine whether they are firmly attached. (Wheels that are secured to the suitcase with screws can be more easily replaced if damaged or broken than wheels that are attached with rivets.)
**Product Updates**

**HOW TO SIZE UP A CARRY-ON**

The single most important factor in buying a carry-on bag is its measurements. If it doesn’t fit in the overhead compartment, you’ll be forced to check it at the gate. Ignore claims on tags and labels that a bag is “official carry-on luggage.” There is no such thing. The dimensions airlines allow can vary by company and by aircraft. In a 2015 Consumer Reports investigation, nine of the 11 models we measured were larger than the size claimed by the manufacturers. So take a tape measure to the store and verify the dimensions yourself. When measuring, make sure to include the wheels and other parts that can add dimension, such as outer pouches and handles. Here are other points to keep in mind.

- Squared corners (vs. curved ones) give you more interior packing space.
- A bag with a zip-away flap closure requires less space to pack than a domestl-style case.
- Be sure to include protruding handles and wheels when you measure.
- Though spinner wheels make a bag easier to maneuver, their construction can reduce the interior space.

**CARRY-ON CONCERNS**

More than half of the 39,000 readers who we surveyed and who said they had flown over the past year reported that they take a carry-on bag on some or all of their trips. Almost three-quarters said that they do so to save time at the airport.

Of course, the timesaving convenience of a carry-on bag is lost if it turns out to be too big for the overhead compartment and the airline forces you to check it. Follow these tips to make sure you buy the right carry-on luggage.

**MEASURE IT.** The maximum allowable (for now, at least) dimensions for a carry-on bag on domestic flights on American, Delta, and United are 22 inches high, 9 inches deep, and 14 inches wide. That includes wheels, retracted handles, and compartment protrusions. Measure the bag with a tape measure. You can’t always rely on the product dimensions found on the bag’s hangtag or on a seller’s website to determine whether a piece of luggage is carry-on compliant (see above).

**SPIN IT.** A four-wheeled spinner, with wheels that turn 360 degrees, is usually easier to maneuver than a two-wheeler. That will come in handy as you’re wheeling it down the narrow aisle of the aircraft.

**LOOK INSIDE.** Not all interiors are created equal, even with the same exterior dimensions. But certain features maximize interior packing space. They include squared (as opposed to curved) corners and outer compartments that are integrated (not protruding). If you need every last bit of space, a two-wheeler will usually give you a few more cubic inches than a spinner of the same size.

**WEIGHT IT.** Most of the weight you lug around should be that of your belongings, not the bag. In our survey, 31 percent of recent luggage purchasers said they were looking for something lighter. Majeau says that if you are an infrequent traveler, consider sacrificing durability for a lighter-weight bag.
### Ratings

#### The most beloved baggage brands

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<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Reader Score</th>
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<td><strong>CARRY-ON</strong></td>
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**HOW WE SURVEYED:** Ratings are based on responses to luggage-satisfaction questions. Respondents—2,718 carry-on owners and 58,973 owners of mid-sized and large suitcases—were Consumer Reports subscribers surveyed online as part of the Consumer Reports National Research Center’s 2016 Winter Survey. The Reader Score represents overall satisfaction and is not exclusively determined by factors under the survey results. If all respondents were completely satisfied with a brand of suitcase, the reader score would be 100. A score of 80 indicates that respondents were very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied. Differences of fewer than 5 points are not meaningful. Each category under Survey Results reflects average scores on the same 0-100 satisfaction scale ranging from completely satisfied to completely dissatisfied. Ratings are based on subscribers, who may not be representative of the general U.S. population.

### WHERE TO BUY LUGGAGE

**WHERE TO BUY LUGGAGE**

In our survey, 13 retailers met the criteria for inclusion in our luggage-store Ratings: Amazon.com, Costco, eBags, JCPenney, Kohl’s, Macy’s, Marshalls, Ross, Samsonite, Sears, T.J. Maxx, Target, and Walmart. Overall, 80 percent of the 4,400 readers who participated in the luggage-store ratings were highly satisfied with their shopping experience at those retailers. Amazon.com, eBags, and Costco were among the highest-rated, and Target and Walmart were among the lowest-rated. Amazon.com and eBags earned high marks across all criteria. Among the respondents who rated the 13 retailers, 21 percent bought their luggage at the online retailers Amazon.com and eBags. Both were rated highly for all aspects of purchasing luggage. Though survey respondents were happy with the prices and quality of the luggage they bought at Costco, the retailer scored low on selection and quality of service.
I want to buy my husband a laptop that comes with great tech support because he always has a million questions. Who has the best?

Like any computers, laptops don't always perform perfectly. If you're not a tech guru, good support can be invaluable.

In this year's CR survey on the topic, we asked almost 10,000 subscribers about experiences with computer manufacturers' phone-staff support, websites, email, or online chat support, and whether manufacturers actually solved the problem at hand.

"Apple got top marks, providing significantly better service than all other computer manufacturers," says Adam Troy, Ph.D., the CR senior research associate who headed up the survey. In manufacturer tech support, Apple scored an 82 out of 100, as well as a 5 out of 5 for phone support and a 4 out of 5 for online support. And readers reported that their problems were solved 70 percent of the time. The next two most highly rated companies, Microsoft and Dell, scored a 68 and 56, respectively. Though Lenovo ranks in the top three in many of our computer ratings, in support it was fourth, with a 54.

For in-store tech support, the Apple Store's Genius Bar was also tops but was matched by independent local computer retailers. Both got an 81 in our reader survey. (Always check to see whether it applies.) CR.org subscribers can see our full tech support survey results at ConsumerReports.org/techsupport.

I just got a fancy wooden cutting board. How can I make sure it stays sanitary and pretty?

You're right to be concerned, because wood is porous and can trap microorganisms. That's why it's important to create a barrier that will prevent absorption of liquids. It will also prolong the life of an expensive wood cutting board. First rub food-grade mineral oil and then a beeswax-based cream into the wood using a paper towel. Consumer Reports countertop expert Chris Regan reports that Clapham's Beeswax Saltd Bowl Finish worked well on wooden countertops we tested.

But hygienic habits shouldn't end there. Once you've treated your cutting board, handwash it after use with hot, soapy water; don't immerse it. Rinse with cold water, pat dry, and stand it up on its side to air-dry completely. You can also occasionally sanitize it with a solution of 1 tablespoon of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Reapply mineral oil and beeswax after each bleach sanitizing or whenever the wood starts to look dry or becomes noticeably lighter in color.

Last, be sure to prevent cross-contamination when preparing a meal by using one board for produce and bread and another for cutting raw meat and poultry, says Michael Hansen, Ph.D., a food safety and environmental health expert at Consumer Reports.
The Great Gift Guide of 2016

This is a gift guide like no other. We hope you’ll find it the most trustworthy guide you’ll use all season, because we’ve worked hard on it all year with you in mind.

The products we’re showcasing are not the favorites of fashionistas or the picks of public relations firms—and certainly not the fingers-crossed-that-it-sells selections of retailers or manufacturers. No, no. This stellar constellation of 104 gift suggestions represents our top-rated products from among the thousands we buy, test, and torture all year long, so we can tell you which excel in performance, safety, efficiency, and value. (Along the way, you’ll find an additional 21 personal picks from our editors and experts.)

Then we organized the choices into groupings to appeal to all the special people in your life, whether they are foodies, social connectors, weekend warriors, or homebodies. Bearing your budget in mind, about a third overall cost less than $100. Digital subscribers can find these and more at ConsumerReports.org/giftguide.

So let the shopping, wrapping, and unwrapping begin!

What the Ratings Mean

You’ll find three kinds of designations in our Gift Guide:

83 OVERALL SCORE

The Overall Score is the numeric value given after we conduct rigorous comparative testing on a large number of models. (Just don’t compare the absolute numbers in the Overall Score across different categories of products; the numbers reflect the specific tests that are important to that product, whether it’s a laptop or a washing machine.)

OVERALL SCORE

The circles with arrow symbols (but no number) are on products that underwent comparative testing but with a pool of fewer models, if you want to see the full ratings charts for a product category (laptops, for example), go to CR.org (for digital subscribers) or consult our full-year index on page 78 to see when they ran in earlier issues of the magazine.

EXPERT ON EDITOR PICK

The third designation is an Expert or Editor Pick; these are products that our engineers or editors endorse based on their own use of the product, either at home or in our labs.
GETTING EVEN

Panasonic FlashXpress
NB-G111P Toaster Oven
510

The world of toaster ovens is not exactly a hottbed of innovation. That's why we're excited about this groundbreaking model. Its quartz and ceramic elements deliver infrared heat instantly. The result: That morning English muffin hits the table faster—and evenly browned every time.
The fastest way to a cook's heart is with a gift that makes meal prep easy and delicious. Show your appreciation by giving one of these culinary wonders.
FOR THE FAMILY CHEF

Expert Pick
Sur La Table Citrus Reamer
$5

"It's small but pleasing to the palm—with nice heft—and it gets every last drop out of your fruit. It's so easy to use and clean that I find I use fresh juice much more often."
—Amy Keating, R.D., a dietitian in our food-testing lab

Cuisinart Power Advantage HM-50
$40

Overall Score
78

In our lab tests, this nicely priced hand mixer outperformed models costing twice as much. It'll turn whipping cream into fluffy peaks in seconds. Stiff cookie-dough, which undoers many bargain mixers, proved no problem. You won't get much in the way of add-ons, but its wire beaters do just fine.

GO FRY AN EGG

Cuisinart CastLite Nonstick Fry Pan
$35

Overall Score
70

This 10-inch pan turns out evenly browned pancakes, and fried eggs slide out like silk when done, without any scraping or sticking. The handle stays cool to the touch, too, so with all hassles removed, the only thing left is to eat and enjoy.
BROWNED AND DETERMINED

ThermoWorks Pocket RT600C

$20

OVERALL SCORE

Tired of guessing or poking your way to the answer of whether your festive roast is perfectly done? With this battery-operated, instant-read digital thermometer, all the cook has to do is turn it on and stick it in the meat as the end of the cooking time nears. It provides quick, accurate, reliable results in an easily readable display.

FAST FOOD PHENOM

Fagor Premium 4 Quart Pressure & Rice Cooker

$100

OVERALL SCORE

Save time, eat well. That's the pressure-cooker promise, and this one is the fastest of three electric models we tested—much speedier than using a stovetop to prepare some foods. Whoever's lucky enough to receive it can cook braised ribs, bouillabaisse, and more, with recipes included.

POP-UP PERFECTION

Proctor Silex Cool Touch 22203 Toaster

$15

OVERALL SCORE

The simple plastic housing keeps the price low, but the performance is not compromised. In terms of toasting consistency, this humble two-slice outperformed models that cost many times more. It's perfect for a college student or that first-time apartment renter in your life.

“Expert Pick

Cuisinart Classic Knife Set

$80

“The lightweight design of the knives in this 15-piece set makes them easy on your hands, and the price makes them just as easy on your wallet.”

—Barner Dietrick, senior product tester
FOR THE FAMILY CHEF

CIRCLE THE WAGONS
The Pioneer Woman Vintage Speckle Nonstick 10-Piece Set
$199

64
OVERALL SCORE

Ree Drummond, The Pioneer Woman blogger and Food Network star, lends her name to this porcelain-enamel nonstick cookware set. Cooking evenness and nonstick durability were among the best we tested, and most pieces are relatively lightweight.

DESIGN FOR GIVING
Krups KH732D50 Toaster
$70

78
OVERALL SCORE

You might imagine all toasters are created equal, with walls of filaments that turn red hot when electricity flows through. Yet many models struggle to serve up evenly browned toast. Enter this top-scoring Krups. Thanks to the layout of its heating coils, it delivers consistent results, whether set for light or dark.

“IT'S SO MUCH EASIER TO ZEST ANY KIND OF CITRUS WITH MY MICROPLANE THAN WITH A BOX GRATER. THE ZEST DOESN'T STICK— IT JUST FALLS RIGHT OFF. AND IT'S JUST AS GOOD FOR HARD CHEESES, TOO. I HAVE ONE AT HOME, AND I JUST BOUGHT ANOTHER ONE TO USE AT WORK!”
—Claudia Golis, CR recipe developer

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NOT OK, has further changes or alterations: Date:
NICELY DONE
Oregon Scientific Wireless BBQ/Oven AW131
$40

Quick Fix
Philippe Richard 6-Quart Pressure Cooker, Aluminum TUI9554
$20

Cool Customer
All-Clad Stainless Fry Pan
$100

Counter Intelligence
Breville Smart Oven Pro BOV845BSS Toaster Oven
$270

Burning Love
Weber Spirit S-210 4611001 Grill
$450

No more need for a host to linger near the grill or oven with one eye on the meat—this leave-in digital thermometer frees the cook for higher-level tasks such as enjoying some eggnog. All he has to do is select meat type and doneness, insert the probe, and wait for the portable receiver to prompt him.

Costing less than a single night of takeout, this stovetop model cooks even faster than electric pressure cookers, especially on gas burners. But however speedy it may be, its limited lifetime warranty means it should be around for the long haul.

Not a fan of nonstick coatings? This 10-inch pan doesn’t have one. But it does have a handle that stays cool to the touch, no matter how hot the pan itself gets, and its magnetic material means this versatile model also works with an induction cooktop or range.

Grilling should be fun, but temps can flare if the propane tank is empty or the burners cook out. This small grill guards against both crises with a fuel gauge and a 10-year warranty on its burners. Plus, it heats evenly, a rarity among small models we tested.
FOR THE FAMILY CHEF

MIX IT UP
Electrolux Expressionist ELJ85688PS Blender $170

It’s not quite the poor man’s Vitamix, but it does cost hundreds less than most über-blenders while delivering performance in the same league, especially when it comes to making smoothies and other frozen drinks. Its compact design—just 16 inches tall—means it’s simple to store, too.

A COOK’S BEST FRIEND
Swiss Diamond Reinforced 10-Piece Set $600

It wasn’t merely the diamond particles in the nonstick coating that dazzled us. Food cooked evenly, the pots and pans have heft, the handles are sturdy, and a lifetime warranty backs it all up.
Show Me the Money
Cash may be king, but other options could make an even better gift of buying power this year.

GIFT CARDS

Pros
In a word: convenience. Just grab merchant cards or payment network cards (American Express, Discover, MasterCard, and Visa) at a drugstore, retailer, or supermarket. They can also be purchased online and sent to you or a gift certificate by mail. Federal law prevents cards from expiring for at least five years from the purchase date or from the last date any additional money was loaded onto them. State laws often provide additional protections.

Cons
Merchant cards can be used only at the walk-in or online store of the issuing retailer. If the company goes out of business, the recipient may not get all the full value of the card, or it may become worthless. And the merchant might not be a favorite of your intended recipient. If you’re sending a gift card to someone in a different region of the U.S. or overseas, there might be few convenient store locations (or none). There might be a small fee to buy and activate network cards.

Security
Some issuers won’t replace a lost or stolen gift card, the Federal Trade Commission says. Others will—with proof of purchase and the card’s ID number—so give the receipt along with the card. But don’t expect to get back any value stolen before you report the loss. Scammers can also copy gift cards codes while they’re still on a rack, then steal whatever money a gift-giver loads onto the card. Before you buy a gift card, inspect its protective stickers or coating for tampering, and don’t buy it if the PIN has been resealed or the sticker seems to have been replaced.

Our Advice
Don’t give a merchant gift card unless you’re certain the intended recipient really loves the store. Almost one billion dollars in gift cards went unspent in 2015, according to the market research firm CEB.

PREPAID CARDS

Pros
Cards can be used wherever merchants accept American Express (3.4 million locations in the U.S.) or MasterCard and Visa (12 million). Also, the recipient can add money to a card and continue using it to pay for purchases. The cards are also a good money-management tool. Make sure you give cards with low or no monthly fees or other user charges.

Cons
You’ll usually pay a few dollars for a prepaid card at a store or online. And not all prepaid cards are a good deal. Some have fees that can eat up the balance. When we rated 20 prepaid cards earlier this year, we recommended only about half of them.

Security
Many issuers of prepaid cards voluntarily offer the same consumer protections against fraud loss as bank debit cards by limiting your liability to $50 if you report the unauthorized use within two days of discovering it. Prepaid cards with the MasterCard and Visa brands go further by providing zero liability. But to get those protections, you must register the card. In October the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau issued a rule requiring that all prepaid cards match the liability protections of debit cards, but the new regulations won’t take effect until October 2017.

Our Advice
Three cards stood out in our ratings: Bluebird by American Express and Walmart; Chase Liquid Visa, and Green Dot Prepaid Visa. They were highly rated for safety (insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation), ease of access, and clarity. They also rated well for value (low fees).
The Great Gift Guide

For the Gadget Geek

For those who go gaga for gizmos, these gifts are as much fun to use as they are useful.
Roomba 960 Robotic Vacuum

$700

Yes, it costs maybe as much as your first used car, but the idea of never having to push a vacuum again is priceless for some. Our tests demonstrate its excellent cleaning capability on carpets and bare floors alike. This latest version also allows you to control it via an app on your smartphone—nice for when you need to clean up in advance of unexpected visitors.
FOR THE GADGET GEEK

DYNAMIC TRIO
Eero Home WiFi System
$500

Now you can give the gift of good WiFi all throughout anyone’s home. The three routers in this pack work in unison to create a “mesh network” that helps eliminate dead zones in the basement, backyard, and other nether reaches. The setup takes roughly 15 minutes, and the network can be managed via an app on your smartphone.

FINE PRINT
Epson Expression Premium XP-830
$200

Perfect for the home office, this versatile inkjet printer is speedy, spitting out 10 text pages per minute (at 5 cents per page). It has a touch-screen display and a document feeder for copying and scanning, and it lets you send paperless faxes with your PC. It also prints very good photos on glossy paper, as well as text pages or images from a mobile device using a WiFi connection.

STICK WITH A WINNER
Dyson V8 Absolute
$600

Once you get past the price, there’s nothing you won’t like about this new model—the best stick vacuum we’ve ever tested. It aced our carpet and bare floor tests and picked up pet hair like a pro. It’s also surprisingly quiet. We wouldn’t blame you for stuffing the V8 into your own stocking. Just don’t turn the thing on!

COOL TO THE CORE
Apple Watch Series 2
$370

The old Apple Watch was aimed at keeping you connected. This new one has added some serious fitness tracker muscle. It’s water-resistant to a depth of 50 meters and has built-in GPS to map your runs, and the heart-rate monitor and step tracking features are plenty accurate. The updated watchOS 3 operating system also lets you share workout data with family and friends.

GAMES ON!
Nvidia Shield K1
$200

This 8-inch tablet is an excellent performer—especially for gaming. What it lacks in all-day battery life it more than makes up for with an excellent high-res display and expandable storage. Toss in plenty of processing power, a Mini-HDMI port, support for Nvidia’s line of gaming accessories, and access to Google Play’s gaming library, and it’s a Borderlands 2 player’s dream machine.
RETURN POLICIES THAT ROCK—AND NOT

1. NORDSTROM No formal return policy. Returns are handled case by case. No receipts required, no time limits, no original tags needed (except for special occasion dresses).

2. L.L.BEAN Guarantees “100% satisfaction in every way” and means it. You can exchange or return an item years after purchasing it, even if it’s well-used. Having a gift receipt makes returns easier, but if you don’t, you can exchange for a similar item or get a store credit.

3. BED BATH & BEYOND You can return in-store or by mail with no time limit (except for baby and maternity clothes and free shipping. No gift receipt? An employee can look up purchases made in the last year. If the item can’t be found, you can get a refund for store credit at its current price minus 20 percent.

4. COSTCO No time limit on returns, except for appliances and electronics, which must go back within 90 days. No receipt necessary.

5. JCPENNEY Accepts returns and exchanges without a receipt at any time, except for furniture, fine jewelry, and electronics. Formal dresses and electronics require original tags or packing.

The Worst

1. FOREVER 21 You must have a receipt. Takes returns within 30 days but only exchanges for other items or store credit; no refunds. Online is better: You can get a refund if you return within 30 days, but you pay shipping.

2. K-Mart Allows 30 days for returns with a receipt. With a gift receipt, you get only store credit. Many items, including movies, and video games, are not eligible for return if their packages are opened.

3. BARNES & NOBLE Two weeks to return for a refund. Items must be unopened, with receipt. With a gift receipt, you have 60 days to return for store credit.

4. GAMESTOP Thirty days for returns (7 days for pre-owned items), receipt required. With a gift receipt, items qualify only for exchanges or store credit.

5. SEARS Returns must be made within 30 days and with a receipt. With a gift receipt, you get an exchange or a gift card. Some items may have a 15 percent restocking fee.

—Donna Rosato

Editor Pick

Amazon Echo

“Build a small space. I use my Echo wireless speaker most of all for Alexa, Amazon’s voice-activated personal assistant. She tells me the weather, plays my favorite music, orders household products online, and turns on the lights on command. My whole life is Alexa-ified, and my wife is as much of a fan as I am.”

—Mike Elias, electronics editor

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FOR THE GADGET GEEK

Expert Pick: Virtual Reality Headsets

“The HTC Vive virtual reality headset tops my list. The two wireless controllers allow you to interact with objects such as a bow and arrow in VR games. But you need to be tethered to a powerful computer to use it. The Samsung Gear VR and the Merge VR Goggles, which both use a smartphone for processing power, are also good. The Gear works with Samsung phones and has a wheel to sharpen the focus; the Merge (Android and iOS phones) has a soft foam body and adjustable lenses for a better fit.” —Renee DiStefano, senior product tester.

Lean Clean Machine

Shark Rocket DeluxePro TruePet HV322
$230

Battery-powered stick vacuums are convenient for quick cleanups, but to vacuump an entire home you need a corded model that will go the distance. This Shark is our current favorite. It’s one of the few recommended stick vacs that provides impressive suction on both carpets and bare floors. We also like that it converts easily to a hand vac, which you can carry far and wide, thanks to the generous 30-foot-long cord.

Image Conscious

Brother mfc-1680dw
$120

This inkjet printer is a great gift for the family photographer. It quickly prints very good photographs on glossy paper (only fair on plain paper) and has a separate tray for snapshot-sized photo paper. Its 1.3-inch touch-screen display lets you preview the images on a memory-card reader. It also prints two-sided copies and scan and fax functions and built-in WiFi networking.
TIME OF YOUR LIFE

Samsung Gear S2 Classic Smartwatch
$350

OVERALL SCORE
83

Don’t let the fancy facade fool you: This state-of-the-art smartwatch is water-resistant and loaded with functions, including GPS tracking, a heart-rate monitor and step counter, and the ability to make and receive telephone calls — and even to pay for transactions at stores via Samsung Pay. The watch will work only with Android devices running Android 4.3 Jellybean or higher.

A GIFT FOR KIDS THAT PAYS DIVIDENDS

ARE YOU SEARCHING for a gift for a young person in your life that will last a lot longer than the paper it’s wrapped in? Here’s a solution: stock.

This kind of gift too high concept for a kid? If a child is old enough to covet a sneaker, say experts, he’s probably old enough to begin to appreciate stocks — and how their prices reflect how well a company is doing. Children can’t trade stocks themselves until they’re 18, so you — and potentially the child’s parents — would have to be involved, anyway. But such a gift can spark a conversation about economics lessons about the importance of saving, and waiting. “It’s a great way to introduce kids to the world of investing in a tangible way,” says Robin Taub, a Toronto-based financial consultant and author of “A Parent’s Guide to Raising Money-Smart Kids” (Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada, 2015). With your gift, you can introduce them to websites such as Morningstar or Yahoo Finance, where they can track their holdings. Here are ways to buy:

GIFT CARDS At Stockpile, an adult can create a custom gift card entitled the recipient to buy stock in Apple, Coca-Cola, or hundreds of other choices. Or buy a Stockpile plastic gift card, which is available at Kmart, Office Depot, and Wegmans, among other outlets. The cards show a particular company’s name, but holders can purchase shares of fractional shares of many companies or exchange-traded funds. (An adult must open a custodial account to hold a minor’s stock.

DIRECT STOCK PURCHASE

The Walt Disney Company’s direct stock purchase plan lets you buy stock directly from Disney for an initial cash investment of $75, or monthly deductions of $30 from a qualified account (the $50 buys a partial share, which builds into multiple shares with subsequent investments and dividends). Other direct plans with kid appeal like no purchase stock directly include Harley-Davidson and Nike.

CERTIFICATES GiveASHare can send you real, paper stock certificates from companies kids know, including Facebook and Netflix. The basic $40 fee includes a cardboard frame, which is required to pay $25 additional for a transfer agent. As to how to wrap it? Well, we’ll leave it up to you about how creative to get!

— Toby Stanger

DECEMBER 2016

CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG/GIFSGUIDE

31
FOR THE GADGET GEEK

**Expert Pick**

**Battle of the Robot Round One**

**Toy Robots**

"In the first of our robot face-offs, we pitted Wonder Workshop’s Dash against the Sphero BB-8, each $150. "The BB-8 is cool. Its head floats like magic above its rolling-orb body. And its app-enabled functionality offers things like voice commands, recorded messages, and autonomous navigation. But the Dash is the better toy of the two, with five free educational apps that introduce programming skills for different age groups." —Emilio Gonzalez, appliances tester

FOR THE LATEST RESULTS OF OUR ROBOT FACE-OFFS, GO TO CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG/ROBOTS16.

**Wonder Workshop Dash** $150

**Sphero BB-8** $150

**FUN AND FUNCTIONAL**

ZenPad S 8.0 Z580C-B1 (32GB) $179

A fantastic screen, fast performance, excellent touch response, and good battery life make this tablet an easy choice even for demanding web surfers and gamers. With a sharp, 238ppi resolution display, this ZenPad is outstanding for watching videos, and its full access to the Google Docs app market provides a large and varied selection of apps.

**SIGNAL MINDED**

Linksys AC2600 Router $249

The reigning king of routers (at least in our lab), this Linksys model can admirably handle a legion of smartphones, laptops, and other Internet-connected devices with ease in even very large homes. It also comes with automatic firmware updates, an admirably easy set up, and four Ethernet and two USB ports. Power users will appreciate its speed and many settings for optimizing their network.
Top Shops for Tech

The best places—online and off—to buy wired and wireless gifts

According to the Consumer Technology Association, 75 percent of holiday shoppers will buy tech gifts this year. They’ll be glad to know that in a recent survey of almost 95,000 Consumer Reports subscribers, most people reported having good experiences buying digital gear both in stores and online—though web-based retailers have an edge over walk-in outfits. As you can see below, BHPhotoVideo.com, Crutchfield.com, and Best Buy were the top online retailers, and Best Buy Electronics, B&H Photo Video, Navy Exchange, and Nebraska Furniture Mart were the top walk-in stores.

Another survey finding: Pushing back on prices can net you savings. Not many of our survey respondents asked for a sweeter deal, but almost two-thirds of walk-in shoppers who requested a better price reported that they were offered one. And for online shoppers that figure was 69 percent.

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<td>Kmart</td>
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Guide to the Ratings: Scores are based on 156,999 purchases of camcorders, cameras, desktop computers, DVD/Blu-ray players, e-book readers, fitness trackers, headphones, laptops, routers, smartwatches, sound bars, streaming media players, tablets, TVs, video game consoles, and wireless speakers by 94,983 Consumer Reports subscribers between January 2015 and June 2016. Reader Score reflects overall satisfaction with the shopping experience. A score of 100 would mean all respondents are completely satisfied; 80, that respondents are very satisfied; on average, differences of fewer than 5 points between stores and 95 percent of online retailers are not meaningful. Each rating category under Survey Results (other than Walk-in Retailer Buying Ease) reflects average scores on a scale from very poor to excellent. Ratings are based on subscribers who may not be representative of the general U.S. population. A dash (–) indicates that we lacked sufficient data.
For Your Favorite Foodie

Choose from our expert-approved edibles to help bring out the inner gourmet in anyone on your list.

Spring Tree Pure Maple Syrup
Dark Amber
$8.80 per 12.5-ounce bottle

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE VOORHES
Experts in our food-testing lab like to give homemade goodies as gifts. “These two treats are delicious and healthy,” says Amy Keating, R.D., a dietitian in our food-testing lab. “Dark chocolate has flavonoids—antioxidants linked to heart health—and the whole-grain flour in this pancake mix amps up nutrition and flavor.” Package either one in a festive container and include the recipe so that your recipients can make these delicacies again.

HOLIDAY HOTCAKES

Pancakes & Maple Syrup

“Using white whole-wheat flour means you get the health benefits of whole grains, but the result is still light and fluffy,” explains Ellen Klosa, who conducts tests in CR’s food-testing lab. Pack the dry ingredients in a 16-ounce Mason jar and pair it with a bottle of good maple syrup. Spring Tree Pure Maple Syrup Dark Amber ($8.80 per 12.5-ounce bottle) has complex caramelized flavors that earned it one of our top rankings among syrups.

Whole-Wheat Pancakes With
Wheat Germ (Makes about 14 pancakes)

- 2 cups whole white-wheat flour
- ¾ cup toasted wheat germ
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 2½ cups buttermilk
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- Maple syrup
- Blueberries, optional

1. Mix the flour, wheat germ, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in a large bowl. If you’re giving the pancake mix as a gift, place this dry mixture in a 16-ounce Mason jar. It can be stored this way for several months.
2. When ready to prepare, place the dry mixture in a large bowl. Combine the buttermilk, eggs, and oil in a medium bowl. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry mixture. Mix with just a few strokes until the batter is evenly moist.
3. Heat a nonstick pan or griddle over medium heat. Scoop the batter (about ¼ cup per pancake) onto the pan or griddle. Let the pancakes cook about 1½ minutes. Flip pancakes and cook about 1 minute more. Serve immediately with maple syrup and blueberries.

A BARK YOU’LL WANT TO BITE

Chocolate Bark

To make this easy chocolate bark recipe, CR recipe developer Claudia Gallo recommends using Trader Joe’s 72% Cacao Dark Chocolate ($1.80 for three 1.65-ounce bars). “It’s a complex flavored dark chocolate,” she says, “and it’s got an excellent rating in our last chocolate test.”

Claudia’s Chocolate Bark With Fruit and Nut (Makes about 24 pieces)

- ½ cup sliced almonds
- ½ cup coconut chips
- 6 1.65-ounce bars Trader Joe’s 72% Cacao Dark Chocolate, chopped
- ½ cup dried apricots, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon salted pumpkin seeds
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped crystallized ginger

1. Toast almonds and coconut in a small skillet over medium heat for 3 minutes or until lightly toasted; do not burn. Remove from heat; cool.
2. Line a baking sheet with parchment or wax paper. In a glass bowl, heat ½ of the chocolate in a microwave at high power for 30 second intervals until just melted. Stir until smooth. Add remaining chocolate and stir until melted.
3. Spread melted chocolate evenly on pan in a 12- x 8-inch rectangle. Sprinkle with almonds, coconut, apricots, pumpkin seeds, and ginger.
4. Refrigerate for 1 hour or until firm. Break bark into pieces and serve cold or at room temperature. Keep it in an airtight container at room temperature for up to four days.
FOR THE FOOD LOVER

DELICIOUS DINNER, DONE
Meal Delivery
Service Subscriptions
Give a budding chef or a busy couple a smart shortcut to healthy meals. In our recent review of plans that bring preportioned recipe ingredients to your door, two especially stood out. The meals we evaluated from HelloFresh ($19 for three meals per week for two people; $276 for one month; hellofresh.com) received very good taste scores. On average, the dishes were lower in calories, fat, and sodium than those from the other services we tested, and step-by-step photos made them easy to prepare. With all organic ingredients, the recipes from Green Chef ($72 for three meals per week for two people; $388 for one month; greenchef.com) earned some of the best taste scores in our tests. We reviewed the company's omnivore plan, but more selective eaters may prefer diet-specific options, such as carnivore, gluten-free, Paleo, and vegetarian.

HelloFresh
$69 for three meals per week for two people

Green Chef
$72 for three meals per week for two people

SideHill Farm
Jams
$6 for 9 ounces, plus shipping

Justin's
Classic Almond Butter
$11 for 16 ounces

"I love the bold, real fruit flavors and the simple ingredients in SideHill Farm Jams ($6 for 9 ounces, plus shipping; sidehillfarmjam.com). This year, I'm pairing the blueberry jam with a jar of Justin's Classic Almond Butter ($11 for 16 ounces; grocery stores), which was a top pick in our recent nut butter tasting."

— Maxine Siegel, R.D., head of food testing
Rubio Aceto Balsamic Vinegar of Modena
$31 for 8.5 fluid ounces, plus shipping

McEvoy Ranch Traditional Blend Extra Virgin Olive Oil
$27 for 12.7 fluid ounces, plus shipping

Editor Pick
SALAD DAYS
Olive Oil and Balsamic Vinegar

"Cooks will appreciate a high-quality olive oil and balsamic vinegar pairing. Drizzle them on cheeses, vegetables, grilled meats, pasta, and bread. McEvoy Ranch Traditional Blend Extra Virgin Olive Oil ($27 for 12.7 fluid ounces, plus shipping; mcevoyranch.com) was No. 1 in our tests from previous years, but the 2016 vintage is just as tasty. Pair it with Rubio Aceto Balsamic Vinegar of Modena ($31 for 8.5 fluid ounces, plus shipping; salumeriataliana.com). Thick and rich, it's pricey but tastes like some of the more expensive balsamics I've tried."
—Trisha Calvo, health and food editor

NUTS TO YOU
Mail-Order Mixed Nuts
When you're shelling out premium prices, you want this healthy gift to look and taste as though you've done more than just grab it off the grocery store shelf. CR's experts conducted a blind taste test of several mail-order mix nut offerings. Some were disappointing—small sizes, broken pieces, even a rancid taste. But in the end, our tests revealed three options that looked and tasted special—and shipping is included in the prices.

Superior Quattro Gift Tray
$49/34 ounces
superiornutstore.com

OVERALL SCORE
Large, whole, salted, fresh-roasted nuts—almonds, cashews, pistachios—and macadamias, which made this assortment extra special.

Superior Trio Gift Tray
$35/20 ounces
superiornutstore.com

OVERALL SCORE
Similar in quality to the Quattro, the Trio Gift Tray features the same selection of nuts, minus the macadamias.

Oh Nuts 4-Section Wooden Nut Gift Tray
$30/16 ounces

OVERALL SCORE
A winning combination of lightly salted almonds, cashews, pistachios, and mixed nuts.
THE GREAT GIFT GUIDE

For the Social Animal

Whether it’s for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or old-fashioned phone chatting, these gadgets will help your plugged-in pal stay connected year-round.

STARK RAVING MOD
Parrot Zik 3 Headphones
$499

Sure, there are cheaper choices, but these Philippe Starck-designed Bluetooth headphones marry form and function beautifully. They have very good sound quality and excellent active-noise reduction, and can be controlled by touch (on the right ear cup) or via the Parrot Zik 3’s mobile app.
Apple iPhone 7

78

Overall Score

Apple removed the headphone jack on its newest iPhone, but our testers report that the sound quality loses nothing with Apple’s new EarPods. The 12.2-megapixel camera is similar to the one on the iPhone 6s, though the 7.2-megapixel front-facing camera has a higher resolution than previous models. (The 2x optical telephoto lens on the 7 Plus provides a better image than the digital zooms found on many phones.)

Two speakers provide a sense of stereo separation, although the bottom one—set into the phone’s side—seems to direct the sound away from the listener.

OnePlus 3 Phone

73

Overall Score

The OnePlus 3 is unlocked, which means you can switch service providers by changing the SIM card. (The phone also has a dual SIM-card slot, so it can accommodate a second number for, say, work.) Add in premium features like an ample 64GB of storage, rapid recharging, and a 16.1-megapixel camera and you’re looking at a premier phone at a pleasing price.

Samsung Galaxy S7 Phone

80

Overall Score

The highly rated high-def display, 12.2-megapixel camera (capable of recording Ultra HD video), and long battery life make this a natural for the video virtuoso in your life. Other plusses: The phone’s sleek aluminum and glass body is water-resistant, and the microSD slot allows for expanded storage capacity with inexpensive memory cards.

Jabra Sport Coach Earphones

71

Overall Score

Ideal for someone who likes to keep in touch while keeping fit, this pair of Bluetooth headphones has a built-in microphone and an integrated cross-training app that Jabra claims has more than 50 exercises. A motion sensor measures distance traveled, pace, steps, cadence, and calories burned, and the hybrid in-ear/auralbud design keeps the buds in place on even exercisers’ ears.
FOR THE SOCIAL ANIMAL

Expert Pick
A ZOOM OF ONE’S OWN
New Smartphone Add-on Lenses

“These lenses let you get more camera out of your phone. When we attached them to an iPhone 6s and tested them, we found that in most cases they improved sharpness—at least in the mid-image sweet spot. The $95 Schneider Optics iPro Lens 2x provided the best image quality and comes with a protective phone case that lets you twist-mount it securely over the camera. I also liked the 2x telephoto lens in the $100 Olloclip Active Lens Kit (which offers an ultrawide angle lens, too) and the $20 Photojojo 2x. But both present ease-of-use issues. The Olloclip lens attaches to the phone via a clip, which can obscure controls on the phone’s touch screen. The Photojojo attaches via a magnet applied to the phone with a sticker that can lose its grip with heavy use.” —Kerry Alton, product tester

Schneider Optics iPro Lens 2x
$95

Olloclip Active Lens Kit
$100

Photojojo Telephoto Lens 2x
$20

LEADING THE CHARGE
Acer Aspire 55-371-52JR Laptop
5/7/15

This powerful, versatile laptop has ample processing power to edit photos, play games, or video chat. The 13.5-hour battery life gives it staying power even when the user is on the go, and the wide-angle display and matte screen make it easy to share photos and videos in any lighting environment. A potential downside: The machine lacks an optical disc drive.
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 40d, 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@consumer.org and tell us what you think. We can’t reply to every email 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.

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Snow Blowers
Nine of the top-scoring snow blowers are available. Report and Ratings, pages 9-11

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DECEMBER 2016

CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG 40a
# Gift Guide

## BREAK THE BANK/SPLURGE

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<td>Apple Watch 2 (stainless steel case with Milanese loop)</td>
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<td>BodyGuard E-40 elliptical</td>
<td>$2,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dell XPS 27-inch desktop</td>
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<td>KitchenAid KDTM364ESS dishwasher</td>
<td>$2,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG OLED65E8P television</td>
<td>$4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Surface Book laptop</td>
<td>$2,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Napoleon Prestige Pro 665RSiB grill</td>
<td>$3,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikon D500 camera (price includes 16-80mm lens that was tested with camera)</td>
<td>$3,600</td>
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## FOR THE GADGET GEEK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Price</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple Watch Series 2</td>
<td>$490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asus ZenPad S 8.0 Z580CA (32GB) tablet</td>
<td>$280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother MFC-J680DW printer</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyson V8 Absolute stick vacuum</td>
<td>$700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epson Expression Premium XP-830 all-in-one printer</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linksys EA8500 (AC2600) router</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morge VR goggles</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roomba 960 vac</td>
<td>$900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 8 (32GB) tablet</td>
<td>$450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samsung Gear S2 smartwatch</td>
<td>$300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samsung Gear VR powered by Oculus</td>
<td>$140</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shark Rocket Deluxe Pro HV321 stick vacuum</td>
<td>$320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SphereB88 robot</td>
<td>$180</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wonder Dash robot</td>
<td>$150</td>
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## FOR THE SOCIAL ANIMAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple iPhone 7</td>
<td>$920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity BT914 cordless phone</td>
<td>$170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabra Sport Coach wireless earphones</td>
<td>$170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OnePlus 3 phone</td>
<td>$520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parrot Zik 3 headphones</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Galaxy S7 phone</td>
<td>$910</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sony h.ear MDR-EX750BT headphones</td>
<td>$270</td>
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## FOR THE GLOBETROTTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acer Aspire 55-7715J5JR laptop</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amazon Kindle Oasis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amazon Kindle Paperwhite</td>
<td>$140</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canon EOS Rebel T5i camera (price includes kit lens that was tested with camera)</td>
<td>$780</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunter QLS-03 humidifier</td>
<td>$25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelin Defender tire</td>
<td>$190</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nikon P900 camera</td>
<td>$770</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olympus Stylus TG-4 camera</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sony FDR-AX33 camcorder</td>
<td>$1,050</td>
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<td>Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100 IV camera</td>
<td>$1,250</td>
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## 24-Inch Lenovo IdeaCentre AIO 700

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>83</td>
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40b CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG DECEMBER 2016
Gift Guide

FOR THE COFFEE CONNOISSEUR

Baratza Virtuoso coffee grinder
$330
Bialetti Moka Express stovetop espresso maker
$40
Friedel insulated brushed stainless steel French press
$130
Hamilton Beach 40998 teakettle
$30
iCoffee RC1000-9C12 French press style
$150
Mellita pour-over coffee brewer
$15

FOR THE FAMILY CHEF

All-Clad Stainless Steel nonstick fry pan
$140
Breville Smart Oven Pro BOV845BSS
$370
Cuisinart CastLite nonstick fry pan
$50
Cuisinart Graphite Collection cutlery
$130
Cuisinart Power Advantage HM-50C hand mixer
$50
Electrolux Expressionist ELJ5688PSS blender
$350
Fagor Premium 8 qt. pressure cooker
$150
Kitchen Grips Chef’s Mitt
$40
Microplane 40020 Classic
$15
Panasonic FlashXpress NB-Q110P toaster oven
$175
Swiss Diamond Reinforced cookware
$735
ThermoWorks Pocket RT600C thermometer
NA
Weber Spirit grill S-210 4610001
$700

FOR THE HOME ENTERTAINMENT FAN

Apple TV 3208 (4th gen.)
$200
Bose QuietComfort 35 wireless headphones
$450
Hoover WindTunnel T-Series Rewind Bagless UH70120 vac
$160
Lenovo Ideacentre AIO 700 24-Inch desktop
$1,350
Logitech Harmony 650 universal remote
$100
Roku Streaming Stick
$60
Samsung UN50K5000 Ultra HD Blu-ray player
$400
Sonos Play:5 wireless speaker
$649
Sonos Playbar
$900
Vizio SB3821-C6 sound bar
$230
Xbox One S (Canadian price is for a 500GB hard drive & a game)
$399

Autos

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada. Report and Ratings, pages 74–76

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make &amp; Model</th>
<th>Price Range</th>
<th>Acceleration (Sec.)</th>
<th>Fuel Economy (Liters per 100 km)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0-50 km/h</td>
<td>0-100 km/h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LUXURY MIDSIZED SEDANS

Cadillac CTS
|$61,665–$99,670
| 2.6 | 6.9 | 11.0 | 17.0 | 17.1 | 6.9 | 10.7 |
Jaguar XF
|$60,500–$74,000
| 2.4 | 6.1 | 11.3 | 16.7 | 7.8 | 11.1 |

LUXURY SUVs

Cadillac XT5
|$45,100–$66,595
| 2.8 | 7.6 | 11.9 | 16.0 | 7.8 | 11.6 |
Jaguar F-Pace
|$50,900–$67,900
| 2.5 | 6.3 | 16.5 | 16.9 | 8.8 | 11.8 |

DECEMBER 2016

CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

40c
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1More</td>
<td>855-551-6673</td>
<td>1more.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acer</td>
<td>866-695-2237</td>
<td>ecer.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-Clad</td>
<td>800-255-2523</td>
<td>all-clad.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon</td>
<td>877-344-9901</td>
<td>amazon.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>800-262-7299</td>
<td>apple.com/ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariens</td>
<td></td>
<td>arlen.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asus</td>
<td>800-726-7664</td>
<td>asus.com/ca-en</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baratza</td>
<td>425-841-1245</td>
<td>baratza.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boll</td>
<td>866-301-1942</td>
<td>support.ball.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bialetti</td>
<td>800-421-6290</td>
<td>bialetti.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodyguard Fitness</td>
<td>888-407-3984</td>
<td>bodyguardfitness.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bose</td>
<td>800-869-2114</td>
<td>bose.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braven</td>
<td>877-927-2836</td>
<td>braven.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breville</td>
<td>855-683-3535</td>
<td>breville.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td></td>
<td>brother.ca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact Info**

How to reach manufacturers in Canada:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canon</td>
<td>800-652-2666</td>
<td>canont.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>800-426-3738</td>
<td>clarityproducts.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cub Cadet</td>
<td>800-668-1368</td>
<td>cubcadet.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuisinart</td>
<td>800-472-7608</td>
<td>cuisinart.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuispro</td>
<td>905-475-5104</td>
<td>cuispro.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dell</td>
<td>800-999-3355</td>
<td>dell.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyson</td>
<td>877-397-6622</td>
<td>dysoncanada.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrolux</td>
<td>800-265-8332</td>
<td>electroluxappliances.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epson</td>
<td>800-463-7766</td>
<td>epson.ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fagor</td>
<td>800-207-1060</td>
<td>fagoramerica.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitbit</td>
<td>844-434-8248</td>
<td>fitbit.com/ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frieling</td>
<td>800-827-2582</td>
<td>frieling.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fujifilm</td>
<td></td>
<td>fujifilm.ca</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garmin</td>
<td>866-429-9296</td>
<td>garmin.com/en-ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton Beach</td>
<td>800-267-2926</td>
<td>hamiltonbeach.ca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Honda**

888-846-6329
powerrequires.com/honda.ca

**Hoover**

800-944-9200
hunterfan.com

**Hunter**

866-268-1936
hunterfan.com

**iCoffee**

844-257-0810
icoffee.com

**Jabra**

877-316-7311
jabra.ca

**KitchenAid**

800-867-7777
kitchenaid.ca

**Lenovo**

855-253-6686
lenovo.ca/en

**LG**

888-342-3623
lg.com/ca

**LifeSpan Fitness**

877-654-3837
lifespanfitness.ca

**Linksys**

800-326-7114
linksys.com/ca

**Logitech**

510-795-8500
logitech.com

**Melitta**

800-369-4882
melitta.ca

**Miele**

210-478-9919
miele.ca

**Microwave**

888-871-4444
microwave.ca

**Microplane**

800-555-2758
microplane.com

**Microsoft**

877-696-7786
microsoft.ca/en-ca

**Mio**

877-770-1116
mioglobal.com

**Napoleon Grills**

866-820-8666
napoleongrills.com

**Nikon**

800-825-9910
nikon.ca

**Nike**

877-846-5288
nike.com

**Ollieclip**

800-877-3083
ollieclip.com

**Olympus**

800-201-7766
olympus.com

**OnePlus**

646-851-2228
oneplus.net/ca

**Panasonic**

800-265-3522
panasonic.ca

**Parrot**

877-972-7788
parrot.com

**Roku**

888-621-8081
rokuc.com

**Roomba**

877-855-9933
irobot.com

**Samsung**

800-726-7864
samsung.ca

**Scott**

scott-sports.com/ca/en

**Shark**

800-798-7398
sharkclean.com

**Sonos**

800-680-2345
sonos.com

**Sony**

800-222-7669
sony.ca

**Sphere**

888-977-4376
sphere.com

**Swiss Diamond**

960-224-9044
swisdiamond.com

**ThermoWorks**

800-353-6434
thermoworks.com

**Toro**

888-782-5500
terybilt.com

**Vizio**

888-946-7996
vizio.ca

**Webber**

800-446-1071
webbercanada.ca

**Wonder Dash**

408-846-7860
wonderdash.com

**Xbox**

877-696-7786
microsoft.com/en-ca

**Yeti**

912-994-9384
yeti.com
CUT THE CORD
Clarity BT914 Cordless Phone
$120

Complete with a built-in answering machine, this cordless phone is thoughtfully designed to assist anyone who may sometimes need a little help. The volume on the handset, for example, can be increased to accommodate family or friends with moderate to severe hearing loss. The large, backlit buttons are easy to see in any light. And those big buttons and the louder-than-average speaker can even be enlisted to let the user make and take calls from a cell phone via Bluetooth.

WRITE A BETTER WISH LIST

Gift registries aren’t just for brides and babies anymore. Increasingly, retailer and specialty websites are offering them for any occasion, including holidays. Sometimes called gift lists, they give you an easy way to let your nearest and dearest in on exactly what you want, right down to the model number. Think of them as high-tech versions of a letter to Santa. Sometimes, one retail site is enough. Planning to paddle through Patagonia? Try REI’s gift registry. Is your idea of a stocking stuffer a 75-inch 4K Ultra HD TV? Broadcast your wishes on the Best Buy Wish List. Willing to settle for 5 quarts of motor oil or a two-pack of Super Poligrip? Then sign up on Walmart List.

For those whose interests are more varied, Amazon will host the lists you create and let you merrily add to them from any website by using its Amazon Assistant app. Universal gift registries such as CheckedTwice, Giftster, and MyRegistry.com let you gather your goodies from different vendors in one virtual place. Some even have apps that let you add items while you’re browsing in actual stores. All you have to do is let people know where you’re registered. The sites will show them (though not necessarily you) what’s already been purchased.

A caveat: Read the fine print. The sites are generally free, but you’ll want to know what they’ll do with your email address and any other personal information you may be asked to provide—and it varies. The privacy policy at MyRegistry.com, for instance, says the site may use your information to “inform you about our products and services and those of our promotional partners.” The policy at CheckedTwice says the site has no plans to sell users’ email to third parties but then adds this oddity: “If someone offers us a ton of money, we will gleefully sell your information to outside parties.” If it does, it goes on to say, it promises to update its privacy policy and not to “part with your information in any really scummy way.” As for other downsides, gift lists can take the surprise and creativity out of giving and receiving. But then again, do you really want to give dad another new tie when he’s really craving a camouflage T-shirt and cargo pants?

—Anthony Giorgianni
Footloose friends and family members will appreciate these grown-up toys to help them document their travels—and stay entertained along the way.

For the Globetrotter

LONG SHOTS
Nikon P900
$600

67
OVERALL SCORE

This full-featured camera’s 83x optical zoom lens can capture craters on the moon. It’s pricey but versatile enough to capture distant wildlife on safari as well as sweeping landscapes—without the hassle of having to change lenses.
PLAY MISTY FOR ME
Hunter QLS-03 Humidifier
$40

Hermetically sealed hotel rooms can have notoriously dry air. This petite, packable humidifier is small enough to stash in your suitcase and sit on your nightstand, quietly adding much-needed water vapor to the air. It mist in any direction you want, and because the tank is an inverted water bottle, all you have to do is travel along the base.

NOISES OFF
Phiaton BT 220 NC
$160

If you’re looking for an inconspicuous way to block out the world around you, this pocket-size pair of Bluetooth noise-canceling earbuds from Phiaton just might be the ticket. They have a clip-style remote control, combine elements of in-ear and earbud design, deliver excellent sound, and have good active noise reduction.

SMOOTH OPERATOR
Sony FDR-AX33
$999

Whether documenting a walk atop the Great Wall of China or someone walking down the aisle, this Sony Handycam is up to the job. It shoots excellent 4K (Ultra High Definition) video, and it has very good audio quality and an image stabilizer to smooth out any shake or jitter. It also has a large LCD as well as an electronic viewfinder—and even takes excellent still images.
FOR THE GLOBETROTTER

Canon EOS Rebel T5i
$600

If you're looking for very good video capability combined with the versatility of a digital SLR at an affordable price, this model should top your list. Its automatic features will please novices, and its manual controls let savvy users get creative. Image quality is very good, and it comes with a swiveling touch-screen LCD, which makes shooting and playback a breeze.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN
Michelin Defender
$120 (size tested, 215/60R16)

For climates where snow is an infrequent annoyance rather than a daily challenge, a set of all-season tires is the way to go. In our tests of 16 models, the Defender was the best overall, with solid four-season performance, grip in wintry and rainy conditions, crisp handling, and a quiet ride. Plus, based on our treadwear test, you could expect tread life up to 90,000 miles.

“Thinner and lighter than any other Kindle, the Oasis e-reader is the ideal indulgence for literary travelers. Its nonglare screen makes for easy reading on the brightest beach, and the eight-week battery life means you could get through ‘War and Peace’ and ‘Ulysses’ on a desert island with juice to spare. Though the Amazon Kindle Paperwhite is slightly heavier and has a shorter charge, it’s a solid second choice at less than half the price.”
—Kevin Coye, executive editor, Consumer Reports

Amazon Kindle Oasis
$310

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
$140
GIFTs THAT GO THE DISTANCE

Research shows that experiences satisfy far longer than things. So if you really want to make an impression this holiday season, don’t give stuff—give travel. These three tips will help you navigate the right direction.

BUY A TRAVEL-THEMED GIFT CARD OR CERTIFICATE
Most major airlines and hotel companies offer gift cards or certificates, but for a more personal touch, consider tour operators that specialize in themes. For example, active types might appreciate a gift card from an operator, such as Butterfield & Robinson or Backroads, that organizes cycling, hiking, and walking trips around the world. Tauck offers small ship and river cruises for those seeking a more intimate cruise experience. Some travel agencies, such as Andavo and Regency (members of the Virtuoso luxury travel network) and Liberty Travel, sell gift certificates and provide professional booking assistance.

KEEP YOUR MILES TO YOURSELF
Left-of-f-paper miles often don’t pay. United Airlines, for instance, charges $7.50 for every 500 miles transferred, plus a $30 booking fee, which comes to $480 to gift 30,000 miles—only enough for a domestic round-trip flight. Hotel programs make it easier to gift points and don’t charge hefty fees, says Zach Honig, editor in chief of ThePointsGuy.com. But some cap the amounts: Marriott, for example, won’t let you transfer more than 50,000 per year, which would cover one to six nights, depending on the property.

GIVE A SAFETY NET
You can make sure the globetrotters in your life are prepared for a medical emergency abroad with MedJet Assist, a medical transport program for travelers. You can buy an annual membership ($270 for an individual or $395 for a family) or cover as little as a week ($99 or $195). Unlike basic travel medical insurance, which usually covers transportation to the closest hospital that can provide adequate care, MedJet Assist will take you from almost anywhere in the world to the hospital of your choice in your home country. All that’s required is that you’ve been admitted to a hospital and are 150 miles or more from home. There are no limits on total medical transport expenses. (A more restrictive membership is available for people ages 75 to 85.)

—Donna Rosato
Keep your outdoor adventurer and action hero happy, healthy, and safer with these savvy choices.

ACTIVE IMAGINATION

Sony HDR-AS50 Action Cam
$200

For someone who's always on the go, this easy-to-use model is a great gift. Like the larger, pricier Sony FDR-AX33, this one includes an excellent image stabilizer—a rarity for an action cam—which lets the photographer take high-quality video while skiing or biking or otherwise mixing it up.
ALL MIXED UP
Ninja Personal Blender
With Auto-IQ BL480
$100

Can't afford a personal trainer? Try a Ninja. Okay, it's not quite the same, but you won't find a better personal blender for under $100. Whether your loved one is into fresh smoothies or whole-fruit juicing, this Ninja is up to the task. Once the breakfast beverage is ready, she can take it on the go in the 18- or 24-ounce container.

TOUGH LITTLE TECHIE
Olympus Stylus TG-4
$330

When waterproof cameras were introduced, they could take nice pictures underwater, but on dry land they weren't as good. This top-rated Olympus shows how far these devices have come. It can withstand falls from up to 7 feet, is waterproof to 50 feet—and takes good photos (on a par with most point-and-shoots).

SPEAK EASY
Braven BRV-XXL
Wireless Bluetooth Speaker
$350

At about 19 pounds, this large but portable speaker system is rugged. That makes it great for the outdoors, but even better, it also offers very good sound quality, so it's an ideal companion for ice fishers and tailgaters. Plus it's simple to use, with a clearly marked 3.5 mm input, microphone inputs, and bass and treble controls.
FOR THE GET UP AND GO-GETTER

GRILL ON THE GO
Cuisinart Portable Grill CGG-306 $200

Camping and tailgating are a lot more tasty with this portable gas grill. After just 10 minutes of preheating, it serves up sizzling burgers and steaks, complete with appetizing sear marks. Cooking temps are fairly even across the surface on this two-burner model, and surprisingly, the cooking area—at 245 square inches—is larger than even our top-rated small grill.

THRILLS AND CHILLS
Yeti Roadie 20 Cooler $250

For a cooler that can really go the distance, turn to this heavy-duty model. Weighing in at 15 pounds, it’s got a polyethylene shell designed to withstand a hungry bear, making it ideal for the outdoors type. You can even have a custom design imprinted on top. Best of all, the Yeti stays cool when it counts: In our tests, ice lasted up to twice as long in the Yeti compared with other coolers.

TRACK STAR
Fitbit Surge Fitness Tracker $250

Easy to operate and loaded with features, this is our top-rated tracker. It has GPS, a real-time heart-rate monitor, and a large touch-screen display for reviewing step count, stairs climbed, and calories burned. It’s also a watch, gets phone and text notifications from Android and iOS smartphones, and lets you control a smartphone’s music playback.

A SMART CHOICE FOR SAVVY CONSUMERS

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*Limited time offer, good until 12/31/16
SHARP SHOOTER
Fujifilm FinePix XP90
$185

If you're looking for a waterproof camera that won't sink your budget, this one is the answer to your needs. It has a bold design and comes in blue, green, orange, or yellow. But it's got more going for it than just a pretty face. It performs well and even has geotagging, so it's easy to prove whether the photos were taken in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris or in Las Vegas.

DONATE TO CREATE A BETTER WORLD

IF YOU WANT to join us in our mission to improve the consumer marketplace for everyone, consider making a gift to Consumer Reports. Our extensive lab testing and investigative reporting highlight products and practices—both good and bad. And we share these insights in order to protect and empower consumers. We hold government and manufacturers accountable. We make sure that the consumer voice is heard in the halls of government and industry. We push automakers to make driver and passenger safety a top priority and to be truthful in claims, whether they're about self-driving cars, air bags, or fuel economy. We fight for a cleaner, more sustainable food system. We seek to reduce the number of hospital-acquired infections and the high cost of lifesaving drugs. We endorse digital innovations but seek to protect consumers' privacy in the process. We push for fair and transparent practices by banks and financial advisers, and we warn consumers against scams. If these are issues important to you, please give today, at ConsumerReports.org/donate.

CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG/GIFTFINDER
FOR THE SET UP AND GO-GETTER

FOCUS-FOCUS

Mio Fuse Fitness Tracker
$109

OVERALL SCORE
72

It's nice that some fitness trackers offer push notifications, but not everyone wants to be flooded with texts and email 24 hours a day. For people who want workout data, plain and simple, the Mio Fuse is a welcome option. It monitors heart rate, step count, and calories burned. No GPS. No stairs climbed. The LED matrix display gives the time and color-coded alerts to keep you on track.

HEARD ON HIGH

Scosche SportClips 3 Earbuds
$19

OVERALL SCORE
76

These isolating ear-insert headphones are great for anyone heading out into winter weather who wants to listen to Twenty One Pilots instead of the local carolers. They're compatible with iPods, iPhones, and a variety of other mobile devices. And in addition to being splashproof, they offer very good sound at a surprisingly affordable price.

A TRULY HEARTFELT GIFT

ALMOST ONE-THIRD OF ANIMAL charitable giving occurs in December, according to a 2015 analysis of donations made by 11 million people through the Network for Good online giving platform. Maybe you want to support the prevention of cruelty to animals, the promotion of sustainability in developing countries, or research to find a cure for cancer. But how do you find a legitimate charity focused on your goal—and determine whether it will spend your contribution efficiently? These simple tips can help.

1. Check with the experts. Three major watchdogs can help you find top options in many different categories and make informed judgments about them. Charity Navigator (charitynavigator.org) divides nonprofits into 11 areas (animals, the environment, human services, and so on), then organizes them by focus (animal welfare, wildlife conservation, and zoos and aquariums, for example). You can narrow the results still further by using the group’s own ratings, which make it easy to find the top nonprofits in each category—or by the worst, to see whether a past favorite should fall off your list.

2. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance (give.org) lets you filter charities participating in its National Charity Seal Program in one of 20 categories, which include veterans and the military, arts and culture, child sponsorship, and more. The BBB gives its evaluation of each based on an extensive list of criteria.

3. Charity Watch (charitywatch.org) lists organizations that have received its top ratings. It divides them into 37 categories, among them groups that support American Indians, LGBTQ rights and advocacy, and drug and alcohol abuse prevention.

The charity watchdogs usually evaluate national organizations. If you want a charity closer to home, consider donating to a local group that has helped you or someone you know. Did you adopt a pet from a nearby animal shelter? Has a loved one benefited from a regional hospital or civil-rights organization? If you want to know how the group spends its money, you can often find its federal tax return and other financial documents on its website. If you don’t find the info there, sign up for a free account at Guidestar, a clearinghouse for information about nonprofits, by going to guidestar.org. Those documents generally contain details about how a group is governed and where its money goes, and they can be difficult to navigate. For tips on interpreting a nonprofit’s federal tax return, search the internet using the term “Guidestar Highlights of IRS Form 990.”

And last, tax consequences are a consideration for you, keep in mind that just because an organization is a nonprofit doesn’t mean that your donation will be deductible. When in doubt, check before giving: Go to irs.gov and search for “Exempt Organizations Select Check.”

—Anthony Giorgianni
Bicycle Helmets

Sleek and sporty, the Bell Draft MIPS (pictured) is equipped with Multi-Directional Impact Protection System (MIPS) technology, which may reduce the rotational force and amount of energy transferred to the rider’s head in a crash. The Scott Arx Plus is a similarly good MIPS option. Lightweight (and higher-priced), it keeps a cyclist’s head cool and protected. For kids, consider the Bell Sidetrack MIPS. And a final note: Fit matters, so confirm when you buy a helmet that your gift receiver will be able to exchange it if it’s necessary.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Bell Sidetrack MIPS</td>
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Cheapest Track

Garmin Vivosmart HR
Fitness Tracker
$145

It doesn’t have GPS, but this budget-friendly model has lots to recommend it, starting with the $103 it saves you over the Fitbit Surge—and no skimping on fitness features. It tracks real-time heart rate, step count, stairs climbed, calories burned, and sleep patterns, and displays smartphone notifications (Android or iOS).

Running In Place

LifeSpan TR2000e Treadmill

This treadmill folds and unfolds with the press of a button. The fitness fan in your life will also appreciate the LifeSpan’s sturdy deck and intuitive controls, which include additional incline and speed buttons on the front handrail. The Intelli-Guard safety feature helps keep users safe by causing the treadmill after they step off the running belt, reducing the risk of trips and falls.
Video gamers, movie and music lovers, and couch potatoes of every stripe will be turned on by our experts’ picks of the best televisions, speakers, and other entertainment gear of the season.

ROCK THE HOUSE
Sonos Play:5 Wireless Speaker
$500

This is a great gift for anyone who values sound quality and simple setup in a speaker. It’s pricey, but this Sonos delivers very good sound and is easy to use because there are no wires to attach to anything. You can carry it from one room to another (it has enough power to fill a medium or large room with sound) or connect two or more wirelessly to pump sound throughout the entire house.
THE GREAT GIFT GUIDE

For the

Home

Entertainment

Aficionado

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE VOORINES

53
FOR THE HOME ENTERTAINMENT AFICIONADO

VALUE VIEWING
LG 55UH6550 55-Inch TV
$900

Getting a 4K TV doesn’t have to require breaking the bank. Case in point: This 55-inch Ultra High Definition TV from LG, which costs a fraction of the price of some other 4K TVs. But it still delivers excellent HD and UHD picture quality, excellent color accuracy, and excellent black levels (for enhanced contrast). It also has advanced internet capabilities and a full web browser.

PETITE AND POWERFUL
Creative Sound Blaster Roar Pro Wireless Speaker
$175

This versatile Bluetooth speaker produces satisfying sound from its 2.25x6-inch package. It connects wirelessly or via a 3.5-mm input and has a built-in MP3 player, allowing you to play your favorite tunes on a microSD card inserted directly into the speaker. It can even function as a PC computer’s audio output device.

ELEVATED ENTERTAINMENT
Apple TV (4th Generation)
$199

Just as the Apple TV was starting to feel a bit dated, Apple launched this version with a faster processor, a cool new touchpad remote, and Siri voice control. (Miss something a character said? Siri will rewind the video by a few seconds and turn on captions.) Apple TV has always been a no-brainer for Apple fans, and this fourth-gen model makes the choice even easier.
VIDEOS VANGUARD

Samsung UBD-K8500
4K Ultra HD Blu-ray Player
$320

OVERALL SCORE

72

Samsung's 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray player delivers excellent picture quality from new 4K Blu-ray discs, including those with high-dynamic range (HDR) technology. It's also 3D-capable, can stream 4K videos, and will look great on the shelf. Its sleek, curved design mimics the shape of many of Samsung's 4K TVs.

A JOYFUL NOISE

Sonos Playbar
$700

OVERALL SCORE

61

Does your elephantine TV have mousy sound? Here's a solution even discerning ears will applaud. In addition to delivering very good audio from your TV, the WiFi-enabled Playbar can team up with other Sonos speakers to create a multiroom sound system. It also streams from mobile devices and internet-based music services such as Pandora, SiriusXM, and Spotify.

BACK TO BASICS

LG 32LH570B 32-Inch TV
$200

OVERALL SCORE

57

Looking for a smaller TV for an office or a bedroom? Consider this affordable 32-inch model. It's not loaded with features, but it delivers very good high-definition picture quality and a wider-than-average viewing angle. It's also a smart TV, so you can access Amazon, Hulu Plus, Netflix, Vudu, and YouTube without having to buy a streaming media player.

RAISE THE BAR

LG SH7B Sound Bar
$550

OVERALL SCORE

53

Designed for TVs up to 50 inches, this 4.1-channel bar speaker system offers good overall sound (for music and movies) and comes with a wireless subwoofer for better bass response. It offers access to streaming services such as Pandora and Spotify, and the built-in Bluetooth lets you wirelessly send music to the speaker from a smartphone or tablet.
FOR THE HOME ENTERTAINMENT AFICIONADO

HUBBUB HIDEOUT
Bose QuietComfort 35
Noise-Canceling Headphones
$350

These might not bring peace on earth, but this wireless pair of noise-canceling, over-the-ear headphones will certainly give you some peace and quiet at home, at the office, or on an airplane. They’re big and very comfortable, produce very good sound, and most important of all, are excellent at blocking out noise.

FAMILY FAVORITE
24-Inch Lenovo Ideacentre AIO 700
$990

Families with gamers will love this all-in-one, lightning-fast desktop computer. It has enough muscle to handle video editing, and its 1-terabyte hard drive has room to store every family member’s favorite music (and at least a few of their favorite movies). It also has touch-screen functionality, a webcam, a very good display, and a wireless keyboard and mouse.

*This Roku model packs most of what you get with much larger Roku boxes into a small, flash-drive-shaped player that slips into a TV’s HDMI port. It has excellent picture quality and is easy to set up—just plug it in and register on the Roku website. It also streams programs from all the major services and alerts you when movies and TV shows you’ve been wanting to see are available.*

—Jim Wilcox, senior electronics editor
THE SMART SET
Samsung UN40KU6300
40-inch TV
$500

If your gift see has a small space and big TV dreams, this 40-inch 4K set is a great gift. It’s well-priced and has excellent HD and Ultra HD picture quality and excellent color accuracy. Sound quality is good, and Samsung’s latest smart TV platform lets you stream content from Amazon, HBO Go, Hulu Plus, Netflix, Vudu, and YouTube.

GIFTS THAT STIR THE SOUL

GOOD THINGS MAY COME in small packages, but the best presents don’t necessarily come in a box. Unlike an itchy sweater, gifts of entertainment and culture rarely disappoint.

LIVE PERFORMANCES If someone on your list loves live events but you’re not sure whether he or she prefers Metallica or Mozart, consider a gift card from Ticketmaster, which sells tickets to plays, concerts, comedy shows, and more nationwide. Cards in denominations of $25 to $250 can be purchased at ticketmaster.com, via the Ticketmaster app, by phone (800-745-3000), or at any Ticketmaster location. The cards don’t expire but are not replaceable if lost or stolen.

MUSEUM MEMBERSHIPS Annual memberships to institutions such as New York’s American Museum of Natural History, the Art Institute of Chicago, and Los Angeles’ Griffith Observatory can start at less than $100. They usually include museum admission, free or discounted tickets to special exhibitions, a subscription to the institution’s publication, and gift shop and restaurant discounts. Most or all of the membership fee is tax-deductible, which is like giving a gift to yourself.

LISTENING PLEASURES Subscriptions to streaming music services let music fans listen to commercial-free entertainment on their devices: Spotify Premium costs $10 per month for high-quality streaming and downloads (spotify.com). Apple Music also costs $10 per month, but with an Apple Music gift card (apple.com/tunes/gift), you get 12 months for the price of 10. People with long car commutes will appreciate SiriusXM satellite radio, which has more than 175 commercial-free music, sports, news, and entertainment channels. Prepaid service cards are available in $30 and $50 denominations at Best Buy and siriusxm.com. Look lovers will appreciate Audible (audible.com; $15/month or $59/year), which offers audiobooks of more than 190,000 best sellers, new releases, and more. (Note that most services auto-renew, so the recipient will be charged if he or she doesn’t cancel.)

~Ted Marks

POPCORN PREDATOR
Hoover WindTunnel T-Series Rewind Bagless UH70120
$130

Stellar cleaning performance on carpets and bare floors makes this lightweight 18-pound vacuum great for cleaning up kernels after a movie marathon. It’s also one of the few bagless uprights with a retractable cord. The only downside is that it lacks a brush on/off switch, which can safeguard bare floors and prevent scattering dust.

ILLUSTRATION BY MAX-0-MATIC
DECEMBER 2016
CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG/GIFTGUIDE

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Let coffee perk up your holidays. We’ve selected the best-rated beans, grinders, kettles, frothers, and brewers for the discriminating caffeine cravers on your list.

ITALIAN LESSON
Bialetti Moka Express
Stovetop Espresso Maker
$35

After testing this iconic stovetop espresso maker in our labs, our testers understand why it’s a fixture in almost 90 percent of Italian kitchens. The octagonal design evenly distributes heat and also makes it easy to grip to connect the two halves tightly. It comes in five sizes and in unadorned aluminum, as well as several colors.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE VOORHES
FOAM SWEET FOAM
Capresso Froth Plus 104.04
$60

This squat electric frother makes whipping up a batch of hot, frothed milk simple—and free of the mess we made with some of the manual models we tested. The unit has three temperature settings, an auto-shutoff function, and a two-piece design (the pitcher separates from the heating element) that makes it easy to pour and clean. Tip: Use skim milk; it foams better. Also sold in black.

SIMPLE PLEASURE
Melitta Pour-Over Coffee Brewer
$13

Of all the methods devised to extract flavor from coffee beans, this device—invented by a German hausfrau more than a century ago—remains a favorite for pour-over coffee brewers and our testers alike. Line the cone with a filter, pour hot water over the grinds, and the rest is left to gravity. It doesn’t take a hausfrau to appreciate that it’s as easy to clean as it is to use.

BARGAIN BOIL
Hamilton Beach 40998
$10

An electric teakettle can set you back as much as $180, which makes this $20 Hamilton Beach a steal. It’s almost as fast as the more expensive Capresso (on page 68), holds 4 cups of water, and is made of stainless steel, which will please anyone on your list who’s not a fan of plastic.

SUPER SIPPER
Blue Bottle Three Africans
$21 per pound; bluebottlecoffee.com

This medium-bodied brew is made with a blend of one Congolese and two Ethiopian coffees. The tangy flavor is complex, with mostly citrus, floral, and berry notes.
FOR WHEN YOU HAVE THE URGE TO SPLURGE

GREAT GRINDS
Baratza Virtuoso Coffee Grinder
$240

With a sticker shock-inducing price and a fancy name, this burr coffee grinder promises a lot. It also delivers. Quiet and powerful, the Virtuoso grinds beans to a consistent size every time—even on the finest setting—making it an equally exquisite tool for drip coffee, espresso, and everything in between.

BEST IN SHOW
iCoffee RCB100-BC12
French-Press Style
$100

The iCoffee’s SteamBrew process spritzes and swills the grounds as the carafe fills, combining the ease of a drip machine with the rich-tasting results of a French press—an uncommon combo that made it the highest-scoring specialty coffee maker in our tests. It’s also one of the few coffee makers that’s fun to watch.

BUZZWORTHY
Cafe Altura Organic Colombian
$14 per pound; cafealtura.com

Medium-bodied coffee with big flavor and notes of fruit and chocolate.

"If you want to earn some coffee cred with a budding barista, you can't go wrong with the simple and stylish Bruer Cold Bruer. A mixture of ice and water placed in the upper chamber drains onto the grounds at a rate of a drop per second. In 12 to 24 hours, it produces up to 20 ounces of smooth brew without the familiar bitterness of coffees made with hot water. Also available in gray and red."

—Beverly DiLaura, senior product tester

PHOTOS: MATTEO RICCIOLI/GETTY IMAGES; JEN MILLER/QUAD/IMAGING; MAGGIE HARTUNG/QUAD/IMAGING

CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG/GIFTGUIDE

POOR FAIR GOOD VERY GOOD EXCELLENT
DOUBLE FEATURES
Frieling Insulated Brushed Stainless Steel French Press 0131
$25

This forward-thinking French-press coffee maker is twice as nice as traditional models: Its double-walled stainless steel carafe keeps coffee hot long after it’s made, and its surface stays cool. The double layer of mesh on the plunger helps prevent grounds from polluting the brew. With a 44-ounce capacity, it’s an ideal size to brew loose tea, too.

PICK-ME-UP
Heart Coffee Roasters
Stereo Blend
$18 per pound: heartroasters.com

Our top-rated boutique blend makes for a bright cup with a pleasently strong aroma. Note: The mix of beans changes seasonally.

EYE-OPENER
Counter Culture
La Gondolierina Colombia Certified Organic
$23 per pound: counterculturecoffee.com

A complex, intensely flavored organic Colombian coffee, this brew is fruity and floral with a hint of chocolate.

IN HOT WATER
Capresso H2O Plus
$19

All six of the electric teakettles we tested brought a liter of water to a rolling boil faster than a microwave (around 4 minutes for most) and shut off automatically. The 6-cup Capresso makes the wish list because it’s slightly faster than the rest; the glass carafe and silver handle add a dash of style to the counter.
Sometimes nothing says "I love you" like no-holds-barred extravagance. We've got some quality indulgences for anyone who's ready to be a big spender.

**For When You Have The Urge to Splurge**

**BEST IN SHOW**

**LG OLED55E6P TV**
$4,000

This 55-inch 4K UHD TV topped our ratings this past year—a testament to organic light-emitting diode (OLED) technology. Blessed with best-in-class deep black levels and an unlimited viewing angle no LED LCD can match, it delivers excellent high-def picture quality and ultra-high-def performance.
VIDEO VIRTUOSO

Valio Flip 2 Laptop
$1,300

Who says a high-end laptop has to be all business? This one combines an Intel Core i5 processor, 8GB of RAM, and Intel's Iris Graphics tech to handle video editing and game playing with ease. The 256GB solid-state drive loads files with superb speed. And the integrated hinge lets you flip the high-resolution touch screen to transform the laptop into a tablet.

FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

27-inch Dell XPS
$1,500

This all-in-one desktop is flush with features everyone will appreciate. It has a high-resolution touch-screen monitor and plenty of processing power for editing, gaming, and streaming. The 1TB hard drive offers ample room for movies, music, and photos. Plus there's a DVD burner, a webcam, and a two-piece speaker system with better-than-you'd-expect sound.

PICTURE PERFECT

Nikon D500 (with 16-80 mm lens)
$2,600

When you spring for a top-notch camera you want options, and this Nikon provides plenty. Set it on auto and let it do all of the work. Or take control by shifting to one of several manual modes. The viewfinder and spacious swiveling touch-screen display are both excellent, and the image quality and 4K video got high marks in our tests.

BEAUTY AND BRAINS

Apple Watch Series 2
$650

This dressy version of Apple's new smartwatch is encased in stainless steel (rather than aluminum) and comes with an elegant Milanese mesh band, elevating the techno timepiece to a fashion accessory. Hardwearing as well as handsome, it's water-resistant to 50 meters, offers built-in GPS, heart-rate monitor and step-tracking features, and allows workout data sharing.

VIEW TO A FILL

KitchenAid KDTM804ESS Dishwasher
$1,800

This model is quiet, not meek, with a window that lights up at the end of a cycle to announce that the dishes are done. Cleaning and efficiency are first-rate.
FOR WHEN YOU HAVE THE URGE TO SPLURGE

HOT AND HEAVY
Napoleon Prestige Pro 665RSIB
$2,600

No Napoleon complex here: This large grill is the sole representative of its stature to earn our recommendation. Its cooking surface heats evenly and can fit at least 28 burgers. But it's not merely a high-Btu brute. The five main burners possess enough finesse to snag an excellent score in our indirect-cooking and temperature-range tests.

THE LAPTOP OF LUXURY
Lenovo ThinkPad X1
$1,399

The ThinkPad X1 is a fine laptop. But what makes it really cool is its modular design. You can customize it with all manner of meaningful extras. Add the detachable keyboard and it's a very good laptop—thin and light, with 11.25 hours of battery life. Another add-on ($130) provides a battery and extra ports. And yet another module ($250) supplies a tiny Pico projector.

LIGHTER THAN AIR
Apple MacBook 12-Inch Laptop
MF855LL/A
$1,200

The jewel in Apple's revived MacBook line, this 12-inch laptop offers an excellent Retina display, a fast, efficient solid-state drive, and more than 16 hours of battery life. There's no optical drive for handling CDs or DVDs, but it does handle web browsing, video editing, and multimedia gaming effortlessly. Best of all, it weighs only 2 pounds.

ARTISTIC INSPIRATION
Microsoft Surface Book Laptop
$1,299

A hip look, bountiful features, and a detachable screen make this a go-to gift for creative types who want a tablet with the power of a traditional laptop. The high-resolution touch-screen display, Intel Core i5 processor, and 8GB of RAM are ideal for photo and video editing. And the included Surface Pen makes old-fashioned drawing and note-taking easy and precise.
POWER COUPLE
LG Washer WT1101CV $700
LG Dryer DLEY1701V, DLG172V $700; $850

They look and work well together. Even better, they're designed to deliver impressive performance and save time. Their big capacities allow for larger loads, and the high-efficiency top-loader's TurboWash option cuts about 15 minutes off normal wash time without sacrificing performance.

GROUP GIVING: THE MORE THE MERRIER

Cheeping in for a gift with a bunch of friends or family members can be a logistical nightmare, but some new websites promise to make the pain of passing the envelope a thing of the past. Be aware: These sites don't offer returns or exchanges. And always read a site's privacy policy before placing an order.

eGifter lets you pick an electronic gift card from more than 250 national merchants, including Amazon and Best Buy, and then invite people via email, text, or social media to contribute. Payments can be made by credit card, PayPal, or even bitcoin, and everyone who gives can add a message or photo, animation, or video to the accompanying greeting card. There are no fees for the service.

HipChip sells gift cards from dozens of restaurants and retailers as well as Visa network gift cards, which can be used anywhere Visa is accepted. It sends invitations and tracks all contributions, charging each contributor a 50 cent processing fee. There's also a $5 to $50 charge for the Visa gift card, depending on the denomination. A bit pricey, so decide whether it's worth the convenience.

GiftStarter offers gift cards and a curated selection of products, including electronic Beats wireless headphones ($380) and a 9-foot-long shuffleboard table ($800). It charges an 8 percent fee for the service. Some of the product details and pictures are skimpy, which can make it difficult to compare prices with those for the same items elsewhere.

Flow: Top Down

FIT AND PROPER
Bodyguard E-40 $249

Thanks to an innovative design, Bodyguard shrank the footprint of this elegant elliptical down to 62 inches—at least a foot shorter than our other top picks. There's no sacrifice in performance, and our testers were impressed with the durable construction.
Road Report

Ratings from our test track plus expert car advice
Staying Power

This year’s Annual Auto Reliability Survey saw the rise of luxury brands, a mixed bag for Japanese brands, and some reliability stumbles by stalwarts—causing big and surprising shuffles in our rankings.

by Michelle Naranjo

It's easy to assess the style, spaciousness, and features of a new vehicle in a showroom. You can even take it for a spin to see whether its performance is up to your expectations. But there's no way to test drive a vehicle's reliability. For that, you need time and data. So every year we send Consumer Reports subscribers our Annual Auto Reliability Survey to determine which vehicles are likely to be dependable and which ones are an invitation to years of headaches.

This year we gathered data on more than half a million vehicles, covering more than 300 models from 2000 to 2016, plus a few early 2017s. With that much information, Consumer Reports can predict the future reliability of established models. We can also make predictions on new or redesigned models based on similar models and brand history (see “Our Expert Predictions of Reliability for 2017 Cars,” on page 68).

A close inspection of this year's data reveals a few trends:

First, the least surprising news: Toyota and Lexus topped our list of the most reliable brands again. Toyota uses tried-and-true methods to build its vehicles, taking a conservative, evolutionary approach.

Buick moves into the top three brands this year. Its core product line is mature, with most problems having been ironed out. But Buick has introduced several new vehicles, which could have an impact on future brand performance.

Subaru dropped out of the top 10 reliable brands because of multiple problems in the Legacy sedan and Outback wagon, which now have average reliability. The drop was compounded by the WRX/STI falling to below average reliability.

Tesla's Model S has improved to average reliability, which now makes the electric car one of our recommended models. But its new Model X SUV has been plagued with malfunctions, including its complex Falconwing doors. Both vehicles can be upgraded to include Tesla's optional semi-autonomous Autopilot software, which can lock the car to maintain lane position, speed, and following distances on its own.

Consumer Reports has serious concerns about how some automakers, including Tesla, have designed, deployed, and marketed their autonomous technology. We believe automakers need to clearly communicate what these systems can and cannot do. (See “What You Need to Know About Semi-Autonomous Technology,” on page 73.) To that end, we have identified models in our ratings that offer semi-autonomous features.

LESSON FROM OUR ANNUAL AUTO RELIABILITY SURVEY

If you study reliability as long as we have, you start to notice recurring themes. Those are general principles that cut across pretty much all models and brands, and serve as good advice for anyone in the market for a new vehicle. Here are three key insights.

LESSON 1 Don’t just shop by brand.

Not all vehicles in a brand lineup are created equally. In fact, most are a mixed bag. Infiniti, for instance, has products that stretch from a best score of 91 for the Q70 sedan down to a lowly 33 for the QX60. Ford’s Expedition SUV is impressive, but the Fiesta and Focus have persistent reliability issues. Audi is in the top five brands, but its small A3 ranked below average.

LESSON 2 Wait a year or two before buying a new or redesigned model.

It’s true that a few brands, like Lexus and Toyota, have lines that are consistently reliable, but even they can launch a few clunkers. The redesigned Tacoma pickup was unreliable in its first year, and it took three years after being redesigned for the Ford Escape to improve to average reliability. It can take years for an automaker to work out the kinks. When a car model is brand new or “completely redesigned,” that can mean new parts, new systems—and new problems.

LESSON 3 Increased complexity equals increased problems.

It’s also wise to avoid complicated new systems. In the past few years, Ford introduced its troublesome MyFord Touch and MyLincoln Touch infotainment systems, as well as a dual-clutch automated transmission in its Fiesta and Focus that also had significant problems. Honda and Acura owners told us they had been stymied by problematic infotainment systems and transmissions as well. For Ford and Honda, models with less complex infotainment systems or proven transmissions fared far better.
Road Report

**OUR EXPERT PREDICTIONS OF RELIABILITY FOR 2017 CARS**

CONSUMER REPORTS' Annual Auto Reliability Survey is the largest of its kind. This year we gathered detailed data from our digital and print subscribers on more than half a million vehicles. Our survey takes a deep dive into the numerous things that can go wrong with a vehicle. We study 17 trouble areas, from nuisances, such as squeaky brakes and broken interior trim, to major bummers, such as out-of-warranty transmission repairs or trouble with four-wheel-drive systems. We weight the severity of each type of problem to create a Predicted Reliability Score for each vehicle. That score is then combined with data collected from our track testing, as well as our owner-satisfaction survey results and safety data, to calculate each test vehicle's Overall Score. The charts that follow focus on the reliability part of that equation. Our new survey has probed deeper than ever before to get a more complete picture of vehicle dependability. Previously, we collected information on 10 years of history for each model. To better reflect the longer service life of modern cars, we've gone back 16 years. We also now have the confidence to predict reliability for new and redesigned models. For obvious reasons, reliability data for those models is limited. But by combining what we know about the reliability of the brand with detailed information about previous models, we can give a rating for models that are new to the market. This year, we converted the Predicted Reliability Score from a percentage better or worse than average to a 0 to 100 point scale. This makes it easier to compare different models. The average rating now ranges from 41 to 60.

We found that the 2017 models are generally better than average with better than average and worse than average spanning 20 points on either side of that range.

Our predictions for the 2017 models are based on the frequency of problems for each car for the past three model years, provided the vehicle wasn't changed significantly in that time. Some ratings might be based on a single model year's data; those vehicles are marked with an asterisk (*). We hope this information can help you make a more informed decision on your next new-car purchase.

### Hybrid/Electric Cars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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### Luxury Entry-Level Cars

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<td>Audi A3</td>
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### Luxury Compact Cars

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<tr>
<td>Acura TLX</td>
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</table>

*Based on one model year of data.

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Alert: This vehicle can be outfitted with a semi-autonomous driving package. Consumer Reports believes automakers should take stronger steps to ensure that vehicles with those systems are designed, deployed, and marketed safely. Please heed all warnings, and keep your hands on the wheel.
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| Aprils Midsized Cars | Hyundai Elantra | 79 |
| Aprils Midsized Cars | Kia Forte | 77 |
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| Aprils Compact SUVs | Jeep Patriot | 72 |
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| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | Chevrolet Silverado 2500HD | 89 |
| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | GMC Sierra 2500HD | 88 |
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| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | Ram 2500 | 85 |

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| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | Chevrolet Silverado 4500HD | 83 |
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| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | Chevrolet Silverado 5500HD | 80 |
| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | GMC Sierra 5500HD | 79 |
| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | Ram 5500 | 78 |
| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | Chevrolet Silverado 6500HD | 77 |
| Aprils Full-Size Pickup Trucks | GMC Sierra 6500HD | 76 |
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**Road Report**

**RELIABILITY PREDICTIONS FOR REDESIGNED VEHICLES OR THOSE JUST HITTING SHOWROOMS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hybrid/Electric Cars</th>
<th>Ultra-Luxury Cars</th>
<th>Compact SUVs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toyota Mirai</td>
<td>Audi A8</td>
<td>Kia Sportage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyundai Ioniq</td>
<td>BMW 7 Series</td>
<td>Mitsubishi Outlander</td>
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<td>Kia Niro</td>
<td>Genesis G90</td>
<td>Jeep Compass</td>
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<td>Mercedes-Benz B-Class ED</td>
<td>Porsche Panamera</td>
<td>Midsized SUVs</td>
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<td>Mazda CX-9</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcompact Cars</th>
<th>Sports/Sporty Cars Over $40,000</th>
<th>Large SUVs</th>
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<td>Toyota Yaris</td>
<td>Audi TT</td>
<td>Toyota Sequoia</td>
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<td>Lexus LC</td>
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<td>BMW 6 Series</td>
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<td>Hyundai Veloster</td>
<td>BMW Z4</td>
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<td>Kia Rio</td>
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<td>Mitsubishi Mirage</td>
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<td>Nissan Versa</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compact Cars</th>
<th>Sports/Sporty Cars Under $40,000</th>
<th>Luxury Entry-Level SUVs</th>
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<td>Toyota Corolla iM</td>
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<td>Hyundai Elantra</td>
<td>Fiat 124</td>
<td>Land Rover Range Rover Evoque</td>
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<td>Subaru Impreza</td>
<td>Subaru BRZ</td>
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<td>Mitsubishi Lancer</td>
<td>Toyota 86</td>
<td>Land Rover Discovery Sport</td>
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<td>Dodge Dart</td>
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<td>Mini Cooper Clubman</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luxury Compact Cars</th>
<th>Subcompact SUVs</th>
<th>Luxury Midized SUVs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audi A4</td>
<td>Buick LaCrosse</td>
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<table>
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<th>Luxury Midized Cars</th>
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<td>Maserati Ghibli</td>
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**Alert:** This vehicle can be outfitted with a semi-autonomous driving package. Consumer Reports believes automakers should take stronger steps to ensure that vehicles with these systems are designed, deployed, and marketed safely. Please heed all warnings, and keep your hands on the wheel.
10 MOST AND 10 LEAST RELIABLE MODELS

CHRYSLER 200
Price as tested: $20,790
Overall Score: 72
Trouble spots: Transmission, engine, climate control

LEXUS GS
Price as tested: $68,699
Overall Score: 96
Road-Test Score: 90

TOYOTA PRIUS
Price as tested: $27,425
Overall Score: 65
Road-Test Score: 70

LEXUS CT 200H
Price as tested: $32,012
Overall Score: 70
Road-Test Score: 65

AUDI Q7
Price as tested: $68,995
Overall Score: 94
Road-Test Score: 96

AUDI Q5
Price as tested: $40,135
Overall Score: 72
Road-Test Score: 77

INFINTI Q60
Price as tested: $53,825
Overall Score: 86
Road-Test Score: 90

CHEVROLET CRUZE
Price as tested: $12,116
Overall Score: 78
Road-Test Score: 77

CHEVROLET TAHOE/GMC YUKON
Price as tested: $50,100
Overall Score: 51
Trouble spots: Stearing vibrations, power equipment, in-car electronics

FORD FOCUS
Price as tested: $20,495
Overall Score: 60
Trouble spots: Trumtion, power equipment, in-car electronics

FIAT 500
Price as tested: $17,595
Overall Score: 88
Road-Test Score: 94

RAM 2500
Price as tested: $49,995
Overall Score: 42
Road-Test Score: 42

All models are rated against their peers in their classes. Ratings for models with an asterisk (*) are based on one year of reliability data.

DECEMBER 2016

Ratings for models with an asterisk (*) are based on one year of reliability data.
Road Report

HOW THE BRANDS STACK UP

WE SAW A SIGNIFICANT SHUFFLING of car brands as we scrutinized this year’s data. Our brand-level rankings are based on an average predicted-reliability score across each brand’s model line. We also tracked whether each brand’s rank went up or down since our 2015 survey.

Infiniti is the biggest mover this year, jumping 16 places to crack the top 10. It has a small model lineup, so slight improvements in reliability can result in big brand gains. Three brands dropped significantly: Subaru, Volvo, and Volkswagen. They also have small model lineups, so one or two models suffering a drop in reliability had big repercussions for each brand.

This year we converted our Predicted Reliability Score to a 0 to 100 point scale, with the average rating falling between 41 and 60 points. Better or worse than average ratings fall on either side of that range.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2017 Rank</th>
<th>Rank Change from Last Year</th>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>No. of Models</th>
<th>Average Reliability Score</th>
<th>Best Score</th>
<th>Worst Score</th>
<th>Most Reliable</th>
<th>Least Reliable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Lexus</td>
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<td>Toyota</td>
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LESS RELIABLE

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* Based on one model year of data.

WHO’S IN AND WHO’S OUT

Our recommendations are based on our road test scores; predicted reliability and owner-satisfaction data from our Annual Auto Survey; and independent safety testing. The recommendations may change from year to year based on the latest information available. Here we list models that are either newly recommended or no longer recommended based on our newest reliability data.

NEWLY RECOMMENDED

Models with improved reliability
BMW 3
BMW X5
Cadillac XTS
Chevrolet Camaro
Chevrolet Corvette
Chevrolet Cruze
Chrysler 300
Ford Escape
Hyundai Santa Fe
Mercedes-Benz GLC
Porsche Macan
Tesla Model S

NO LONGER RECOMMENDED

Models with declining reliability
Audi A3
Chevrolet Volt
Dodge Durango
Ford F-150
Honda Civic
Lincoln MKX
Mini Cooper
Subaru WRX/STi
Volkswagen GTI
Volkswagen Jetta
Volkswagen Passat

Alert: This vehicle can be outfitted with a semi-autonomous driving package. Consumer Reports believes automakers should take stronger steps to ensure that vehicles with those systems are designed, deployed, and marketed safely. Please heed all warnings, and keep your hands on the wheel.
WHEN LUXURY TAKES A TOLL ON RELIABILITY

SOME LUXURY MANUFACTURERS made gains in our brand reports this year, but that doesn't mean that buying a prestigious nameplate ensures better reliability. In fact, when we compared mainstream and luxury versions of similar vehicles, we found that paying more doesn't automatically result in a more reliable vehicle. That underscores the need to base your car-buying decision on the model rather than on brand prestige.

In some cases, luxury vehicles are nicely dressed versions of more mainstream models but with additional features. In such cases, the smarter choice is to buy a well-equipped version of that mainstream model, which can deliver an upscale driving experience without the premium price or greater reliability risks.

Here we compare pairs of models—a mainstream and a luxury version of the same vehicle—highlighting our survey findings.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SEMI-AUTONOMOUS TECHNOLOGY

CONSUMER REPORTS believes that autonomous vehicle technology has the potential to improve driver safety. But we also have serious concerns about the way certain semi-autonomous systems, some of which allow a car to steer for itself, are currently being designed, deployed, and marketed. We think automakers need to clearly communicate the capabilities—and the limitations—of these systems. Because this is a new and rapidly evolving technology, little data exists on the safety or benefits of these systems, so we currently don’t factor them into our ratings criteria. Our ratings and recommendations are based on a performance assessment from Consumer Reports track evaluations of how well a car drives (i.e., braking, handling, fuel economy) and reliability scores from our Annual Auto Survey, as well as safety evaluations and external crash tests.

But we do monitor these types of emerging technologies closely. Many automakers have promoted semi-autonomous systems as a safety feature to help with driver distraction and fatigue, but drivers are supposed to remain engaged with the driving process at all times. Some companies, such as Tesla and Mercedes-Benz, have used names such as Autopilot and Drive Pilot, which can give the false and dangerous impression that these cars are more capable than they really are. Several of these systems also allow you to take your hands off the wheel. Consumer Reports believes that as long as these systems require driver engagement, they should also require the driver to keep his or her hands on the wheel. Several of the vehicles in these reliability charts offer semi-autonomous features. They include Tesla's Model S, whose reliability improved enough to qualify for recommended status under our criteria, as well as certain vehicles from BMW, Mercedes-Benz, and Volvo.

We will continue to monitor the evolution of self-driving technology and evaluate whether to make future adjustments to our ratings.
Road Report  We conduct more than 50 tests on each vehicle at our 327-acre Auto Test Center.

Cadillac XT5

Neither a luxury leader nor a sporty standout, the new Cadillac XT5 stalls in SUV limbo.

AS THE CT6 demonstrates, Cadillac can build brilliant-driving sedans. But the brand’s SUVs lack the same magic. The XT5 isn’t as rewarding to drive as a German compact SUV or as pampering as a Lexus RX, placing it in luxury SUV limbo. Though the smooth 3.6-liter V6 propels the XT5 from 0 to 60 mph in a reasonably quick 7.4 seconds, the car feels lumbering in everyday driving—made worse by the sluggish automatic transmission.

During relaxed driving, the XT5 swiftly responds to steering input. But handling becomes reluctant when you pick up the pace, as the XT5’s eagerness to corner wanes. Emergency handling, however, remains secure and confident. There’s nothing luxurious about the Caddy’s stiff, choppy ride. However, plushness abounds inside the brushed cabin, with generous amounts of wood, chrome, and soft-touch materials. The front seats deliver all-day support, but shorter-legged drivers felt that the seat cushion was too long. The reclining rear seat is spacious. Visibility is hampered by thick roof pillars and a small rear window. An optional rearview mirror camera gives a wider view but lacks resolution. The Cue infotainment system has been improved, but we’d prefer knobs and buttons to the touch-sensitive controls. Cadillac’s bewildering gear selector makes finding reverse a challenge, which is frustrating when parking. Despite a few positives, the XT5 doesn’t stand out among luxury and upscale SUVs.

Cadillac XT6

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

HIGHS Flush interior, seat comfort, quietness

LOWS Stiff ride, unrefined gear selector, visibility

POWERTRAIN 3.0L V6, 8-speed automatic transmission, all-wheel drive

FUEL 20 mpg

PRICE AS TESTED $53,035

Jaguar F-Pace

Though Jaguar’s athletic new SUV is supercharged and agile, its loud exhaust is a sour note.

JAGUAR’S FIRST-EVER SUV—the F-Pace—is based on the same rear-drive platform as the new XE and redesigned XF sedans. This new Jag definitely has the “pace,” with its 340-hp supercharged V6 launching the all-wheel-drive SUV to 60 mph in 6.0 seconds. There’s a 380-hp version, too, along with a four-cylinder diesel. And the eight-speed automatic is a smooth operator, although the auto start/stop system fires up the engine with a shudder and hobbles the air conditioner’s ability to keep the cabin cool when stopped. The F-Pace’s quick steering makes it feel athletic, and body lean is kept in check. But the ride is stiff, and passengers feel many quick, short bounces. Though the subdued levels of road and wind noise are commendable, the always-prominent exhaust drone becomes irritating.

Exposures of hard plastic contribute to a disappointing lack of flair for a $50,000-plus vehicle. The F-Pace’s infotainment system is dated and limited. Positives include a roomy driving position, with well-padded and supportive seats. The rear seat is spacious and comfortable, but the seatback can’t recline. Sleek styling shrinks the rear window to practically a sliver. Safety systems such as forward-collision warning and automatic braking are available only on the top R-Sport and 5 trim levels. Despite its speed and agility, the F-Pace loses ground because of its choppy ride, loud exhaust, and unremarkable interior.
LUXURY SEDANS

Cadillac CT6

The plush, high-tech flagship sedan boasts performance and panache.

As witnessed with the ATS and CT5, Cadillac has continued to evolve the concept of the sport sedan. With the CT6, it has crafted a stately, plush, large sedan with engaging driving dynamics. Aim the CT6’s sharp steering toward a curve and this big sedan seems to shrink in size, carving up twisty roads with confidence. And yet the supple and composed ride belies a flagship. The midlevel 3.6-liter V6 delivers ample power in a nonchalant fashion, pushing the CT6 to 60 mph in 6.5 seconds. Other engine choices include a 268-hp turbo four-cylinder and a 404-hp twin-turbo V6, all mated to a smooth and responsive eight-speed automatic.

Inside, the CT6 has a tasteful mix of supple leather and well-crafted trim. It’s easy to find comfort in the big, nicely padded front seats, thanks to the wide range of adjustments. The huge rear seat is a cinch to access, but the short bottom cushion compromises posture. Cadillac has made some improvements to the Cue infotainment system, but the dashboard is still shy on easy-to-use buttons and knobs. The low-mounted dashboard vents compromise air distribution and tend to freeze your elbows. Commendably, forward-collision warning, low-speed automatic braking, and blind-spot monitoring are standard on all versions of the CT6 except the Base trim.

The CT6’s superb road test score proves that it’s worthy of Cadillac’s old slogan, “Standard of the world.”

Jaguar XF

An odd pairing of first-class driving dynamics with a coach-class interior costs this Jag points.

Jaguar continues to struggle to find its place amid the highly polished German elite. Although the redesigned XF delivers exemplary ride and handling characteristics, several missteps mean this big cat comes across as not quite housebroken.

The engine has plenty of power on tap, catapulting our XF to 60 mph in a carlike 5.8 seconds. But the supercharged V6 often sounds like it’s chugging on a hairball rather than purring happily. On the road, the XF’s handling makes it stand out from rivals. The Jag steers into corners with immediacy and feels engaging. It further demonstrated its athletic demeanor at our track. But it was hindered by tail slide in our avoidance maneuver.

The Jag lives up to its reputation for soaking up all manner of bumps, and the hushed cabin isolates occupants from road and wind noise. The firm front seats are supportive for long trips, although even average-sized adults will find the driving position more Savile Row slim-cut than off-the-rack generous. Rear room is snug for the class. For a brand known for sitting roomlike interiors, there is too much hard plastic in the plain cabin. The dated-looking touch screen responds slowly, and the A/C blows patches of humid air. Plus, forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking weren’t available on our $66,000 XF Prestige.

The XF is a viable alternative for buyers looking to breach from the German sedan dominance, but with ambition and ergonomic concessions.
Ratings: Upscale sedans and SUVs capable of hauling five passengers and their belongings in comfort and style.

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**LUXURY SUVs**

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Scores in Context: Recommended models did well in our Overall Score, which factors in road-test results, predicted reliability, owner satisfaction, crash-test results, and availability of front crash prevention features, such as forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking. For these systems, NA means no such system is offered.

Optics: means it's available on some versions, but not necessarily the one we tested; and models with standard systems are rated from 3 to 0 based on their ability to warn drivers or brake autonomously to avoid a crash. For full ratings, go to ConsumerReports.org/cars.

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DECEMBER 2016
Selling It

Food for Thought
Ring in the holiday festivities with these culinary clunkers

A Sandwich Best Enjoyed Solo
Maybe it's a billboard blunder—but you can't say you weren't warned.
Submitted by Tim, Clio, and Ronny Vos of Seattle

Free Is Just Another Word...
Has the dollar bill dropped dramatically in value without anyone telling us?
Submitted by Sharon and John Wash of4tulation, Wash.

This Isn’t Going to Pan Out
What part of “dishwasher safe” don’t we understand?
Submitted by Kate Johnson of New Bedford, Mass.

A Fowl’s Gotta Eat
How do we know that large chickens like their fries small?
Submitted by Joan Hirsh of Beaverton, Ark.

Be on the lookout for goofs and glitches like these. Share them with us—by email to Selling@cro.consumer.org; by mail to Selling It, Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703; or by social media using the hashtag CRISelling—and we might publish yours. Please include key information, such as the publication’s name and date.