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Electric cars
& new hybrids



The New Rules of Car Buying

Save thousands of dollars on a new car. Negotiating is the secret.

Negotiating for a new car can strike fear into the heart of even the most rugged individuals. It's not surprising. Car dealers and manufacturers have arranged pricing in a manner designed to daze and confuse the consumer.

However, simply by understanding the tricks of the trade, consumers can save hundreds, even thousands of dollars on their new cars.

That's why *Consumer Reports* has created *The New Car Price Service*. This service gives you everything you need to walk into a showroom with confidence – and walk out with a great deal.

The New Car Price Service breaks down the negotiating process into a few simple rules:

RULE #1: BREAK THE DEALER'S CODE.

When you walk into a car showroom, you'll see two prices:

1. The *Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP)*
2. The *Dealer Invoice Price*.

Naturally, most people think it is wise to negotiate *down* from the *MSRP* to as close to the *Dealer Invoice*

Price as you can get. And that's exactly what the dealer wants you to think – but it won't get you the best deal. The reason:

Both the *MSRP* and the *Dealer Invoice Price* are "artificial" numbers created by the car manufacturer and dealer to serve their negotiating purposes.

Neither price should be used by you as a starting point in your negotiation.

What you need is the **real price** the dealer paid for the car.

If you know the real price, you'll have true negotiating power because you'll know how much



New-car buyers who use the *New Car Price Service* save an average of \$1,900.

"wiggle" room you really have. You should bargain up from this real price.

Naturally, dealers don't display this real price in the showroom. To obtain the real price for any car you're interested in buying, call *The Consumer Reports New Car Service* at 1-866-350-7996.

RULE #2: FIND OUT ABOUT UNADVERTISED DEALER INCENTIVES AND HOLDBACKS.

These are tools the dealer uses to negotiate to *his* favor. You should know about them so you can use them to negotiate to *your* favor.

Take "dealer holdbacks," for example. A holdback is a percentage that is repaid to the dealer by the manufacturer. The holdback is designed to supplement the dealer's cash flow (code words for sales commissions) by artificially elevating the dealership's paper cost. If you know the dealer's holdback, you can use that information as a negotiating tool to lower your price. To learn how to use these powerful negotiating tools, call *The New Car Price Service*: 1-866-350-7996.

RULE #3: PLAY THE GAME.

The Consumer Reports New Car Price Service takes you step by step through the negotiating game with professional new-car buying advice. And when it comes to options and safety equipment, you'll know what's really worth your money versus "dealer extras" that do nothing except cost you "extra" money.

For example: The dealer's "business manager" may try to sell you undercoating, rustproofing, fabric protection, extended warranty, windshield etching, etc. But don't bite. Such add-ons are generally worthless or overpriced.

RULE #4: IF YOU HAVE A TRADE IN.

Don't even mention it until you've agreed on the price of your new car. But when it's time to talk trade-in, you should know what your trade-in is worth whether you sell it privately or to a dealership. You can get that information from us too and it costs just an additional \$12.

THE NEW CAR PRICE SERVICE

The New Car Price Service costs \$14 and can save you thousands of dollars on a new car. The service gives you a complete report on the car you are interested in purchasing. The report is an organized plan and advice on playing the game. While the average savings is \$1,900, the potential savings is far greater, depending on the model of car. For example, the potential savings on the Jeep Liberty is \$5,757. The phone call is free: 1-866-350-7996

To Save Money Fast:

Please have the following ready when you call:

- ✓ Year, make and model of the new car, minivan, van, SUV, or pickup truck you want to buy. (Example: 2007 Honda Accord)
- ✓ Year, make, model, and trim line of your trade-in, if you have one. (Example: 2001 Honda Odyssey)
- ✓ Your credit card (Visa, MasterCard, Discover or American Express)

call toll-free

1-866-350-7996

For service in Canada go to: www.ConsumerReports.org/canada27

Consumer Reports NEW CAR PRICE SERVICE

1010C

ADVERTISEMENT

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\$1,500 Fill your cart with **store-brand products** and save this much at the market per year.

\$1,296 Follow our **energy-savings** advice to cut your bills by this amount per year.

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Check us out online

Free at ConsumerReports.org

Find all of this and more at www.ConsumerReports.org/highlights

Save energy. See our buying-guide video on the newest energy-efficient water heaters.

Electric cars. Watch a video of the new Chevrolet Volt as we take a first look at it on our track.



For ConsumerReports.org subscribers

Ratings. Get the latest Ratings of electronics products, including cell phones, digital cameras, laptops, and more.

Coming in November

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Who we are

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

What we do We buy all the products we rate.

What we don't do We don't accept paid advertising; we get our money mainly through subscriptions and donations. And we don't accept free test samples from manufacturers.

How to reach us Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057, attn: Customer Service.

- To send a letter to the editor, go to ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.
- For news tips and story ideas, go to ConsumerReports.org/tips.
- E-mail submissions for Selling It to SellingIt@cro.consumer.org.
- For subscription information, go to ConsumerReports.org/magazine or call 800-666-5261. See page 64 for more details.

Ratings We rate products using these symbols:

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

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

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

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

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

Furget it

"Fees That Irk Travelers" (Up Front, August 2010), was right on, especially the pet carry-on charge. When I flew cross-country I paid more for my cat than myself. I offered to buy my cat a seat but was told that I would still have to pay a surcharge because the cat must be under the seat.

Carol Agate
Cambridge, MA



Bad vibrations

In "Stopping the Shake, Rattle, and Roll" (Up Front, August 2010), you tested pads to stop front-loader washers from vibrating. I used a rubber pickup truck bed mat, cut to size, and it dances no more around my washroom.

Michael Reinhart Longview, TX

Protein drinks

Reading "Alert: Protein Drinks" (July 2010), I'm reminded of a 15-year-old patient I saw because of bed-wetting. He had last bed-wet at age 8 and had been dry till a month before. There were no other symptoms, and his exam and tests were normal. Recently he had begun weightlifting and drinking a lot of "amino" protein powder. When he stopped drinking it, his bed-wetting stopped.

Yi Ching Honolulu

Treating depression

"Depression & Anxiety" (July 2010) was well-written, but note that while the American Psychological Association is the major association for psychologists, the equivalent for licensed counselors is the American Counseling Association or the National Board for Certified Counselors.

Susan Strong Prescott Valley, AZ

In "Depression & Anxiety" (July 2010), a doctor says that when people taking antidepressants experience sexual side effects, she adds another drug as an antidote. What is that drug?

Leonard Graff San Francisco

Drugs that are used include the antidepressant bupropion (Wellbutrin and generic), the anti-anxiety drug buspirone (BuSpar and generic), and erectile dysfunction drugs such as sildenafil (Viagra and generic).

Ask our experts

I have component-video cables connecting a Comcast HD set-top box to a 720p TV. Will I see an improvement if I switch to an HDMI cable?

Dugald McMillan East Lansing, MI

You won't see much improvement in TV picture quality; a 1080p set might benefit more, but not a lot. You need an HDMI cable to get a 1080p signal from a Blu-ray player or upconverted video from a DVD player. Otherwise, don't bother redoing your setup.

My car insurer raised my premium because my credit score dropped after I opened a credit-card account. What does one have to do with the other?

Mary Thayer Houston

Insurers say the way you manage your finances predicts whether you'll file a claim. We'd like to see that practice banned. In the meantime, boost your credit score by paying off card balances and fixing errors. To find the best deals on car insurance, see page 34.

A repairman told me that high-quality furnace filters impede airflow, making the furnace work harder. Is that true?

Paul Seguin Venice, FL

They don't make a furnace work harder, just longer. High-efficiency filters are designed to trap smaller particles, so it's more difficult for air to get through them. In our airflow-resistance tests of whole-house air filters, also known as furnace filters, we found that some are better than others. Follow manufacturers' recommended replacement intervals or replace high-efficiency filters after finishing tasks that disperse fine particles, such as sanding.

Are the dates on soft drink cans expiration dates?

Anna Ritchey Roswell, NM

They're "best if used by" dates. An industry rep we spoke to said there's no safety risk in drinking sodas past that date, but sugared sodas might taste syrupy as they lose carbonation. (The bubbles help neutralize sweetness.)

The artificial sweeteners in diet drinks degrade over time, leading to the opposite problem: too little sweetness. Store soda in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight.

My dealer insisted that I sign an arbitration agreement before closing the deal on my car. Is this customary?

M. Rowley High Point, NC

It's common, though by signing you could be giving away your right to sue the dealer or automaker, join a class-action lawsuit, file a claim under your state's consumer-fraud or lemon-law provisions, or even appeal an arbitrator's decision. If you see such a clause, find out how it affects your options. If you don't agree, ask to have the words eliminated from the contract or buy the car elsewhere.

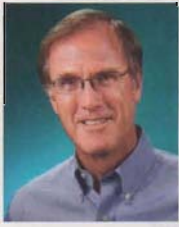
SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO www.ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts.



DON'T WAIT
For the best taste, drink soda before its "use by" date.

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

X Prize marks the car



For more than a century, a gallon of gas has gotten us only so far down the road—usually less than 30 miles. But for decades, dreamers have been telling us that we're just this

close to a phenomenally efficient car.

"Show us the goods," consumers have challenged. But that's not easy and we're still waiting.

To throw the motivation into high gear, the X Prize Foundation is offering \$10 million to be split by the teams that build cars that get at least 100 mpg (or the equivalent if the vehicle doesn't run on gas). Winners will be announced in September.

X Prize officials have measured fuel economy, range, and emissions. But energy efficiency isn't everything. To work in the real world, a car also has to be practical, affordable, and safe.

CONSUMER REPORTS was invited to help judge safety. We set up our instrumentation for the X Prize testing at the Michigan International Speedway. To win, the cars had to successfully navigate our accident-avoidance course at 45 mph, accelerate fast enough not to be an obstacle in traffic, and come to a stop from 60 mph in 170 feet or less. (We pegged those requirements to the poorest performances of cars we've tested on our own track.)

The contest began with 136 entries from around the globe. Just seven teams made it through the Finals.

The X Prize competition has been fascinating, but it has also been a fantastic example of ingenuity and determination. Too many of us have shrugged and accepted plodding gains in fuel efficiency. These innovators have not, and in the end, all of us will be winners because of them.

Jim Guest
Jim Guest
President

Come to our annual meeting

Please join us on Saturday, Oct. 16, at our national headquarters, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY. Doors open at 9:30 a.m., the meeting begins at 10, and selected tours start at 11. We're changing the tours a bit this year; for details go to www.ConsumerReports.org/annualmeeting.

Zombie debt never dies

WHEN THE COMPANY that he worked for went out of business, Harold Wood fell behind on his credit-card payments. He hoped to get back in the black quickly, but his financial troubles would haunt him for years. The bank bundled his debt with others and sold to it to a collection agency. Then things got murky.

Wood, an information-technology professional from Kent, Wash., was called by a debt collector who said that he had bought Wood's credit-card debt. Wood started making payments to the collector, but soon he was contacted by a second one. When yet another called, Wood hired an attorney. "I realized that my credit-card account had been sold to multiple collectors, none of whom could prove they really owned it and had the right to receive my payments."

By the time Wood filed two lawsuits, which were settled in his favor, 13 collectors were laying claim to his debt.

One debt, many collectors

The debt-buying industry is made up of large and small companies, law firms, and private investors who buy and sell hundreds of millions of dollars of defaulted debt each year.

Although the law protects consumers from certain egregious debt-collection practices, buying and selling debt is essentially unregulated. Spreadsheets of

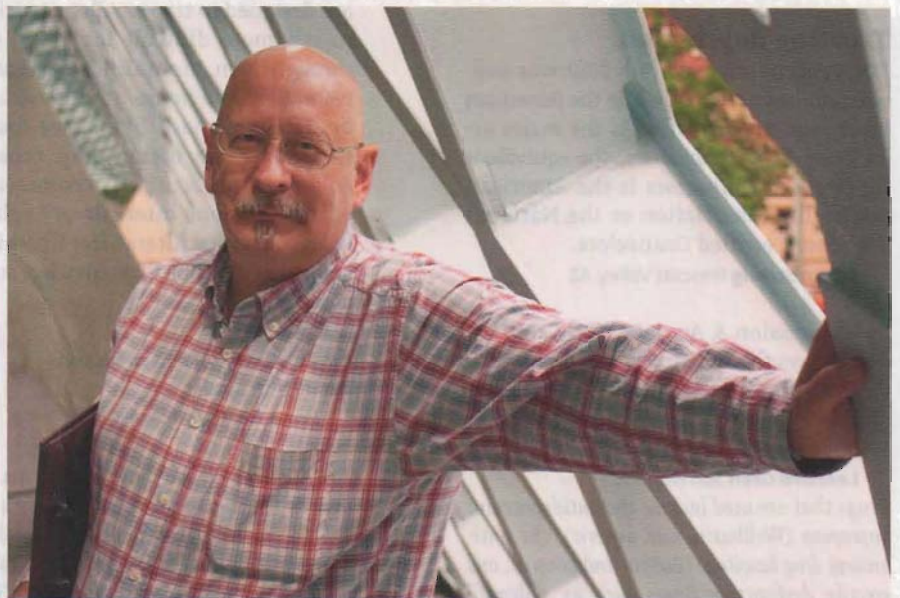
debt with inadequate or no records of payments, disputes, or prior exchanges with the consumer can be sold and resold. Debt that's invalid, paid off, or disputed can reappear for years.

Statutes of limitations exist on the length of time a collector has to sue a debtor, as do restrictions on reporting the debt to a credit agency. But there's no time limit on the sale of debt. And many states let debt collectors revive a debt that's past the statute of limitations if they persuade the consumer to make a payment.

Consumers Union believes that any debt that's sold must include all information about the account. In addition, debt that's past the statute of limitations should not be revived just because the consumer makes a payment. And there should be a ban on selling or collecting any debt more than seven years after the default.

What you can do

- If a collector calls and you believe the debt isn't yours, write the collector, who must send evidence within five days.
- Find out your state's statute of limitations before you pay a debt collector anything; payment can start the clock again.
- Respond to court notices; if you don't show up, the collector can freeze your bank accounts or garnish your wages.



NIGHTMARE Harold Wood's credit-card debt was resold to more than a dozen collectors.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEFANIE FELIX

Up front



Our readers reveal: Best burgers

MCDONALD'S BURGERS are certainly cheap and fast, but you still might wonder why billions have been consumed when you see the results of our recent survey of 28,000 online subscribers who rated burgers at 18 fast-food restaurants.

Among the standouts were In-N-Out Burger and Five Guys Burgers and Fries. The biggest loser: McDonald's. Burger King and Wendy's fared better than McDonald's but far worse than the highest-rated chains.

In-N-Out Burger, which touts its fresh ground chuck, has 247 restaurants in California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. Five Guys had 640 restaurants in 42 states. And McDonald's? 14,000 restaurants. We sent a reporter (not a trained taster, but he has eaten his share of burgers) to make an informal comparison of the fare at Five Guys and McDonald's. Here's what he found:

Five Guys. The regular hamburger, two 3.3-ounce griddled patties, was served well done on a lightly browned sesame-seed bun. You can order any of 15 free toppings (the usual, plus options such as grilled mushrooms and jalapeno peppers). Bacon and cheese cost extra. The patties had a bit of searing along the edges, a chewy texture (the chopped meat was

fairly coarse), and a beefy flavor. They reminded our reporter of minute steak. The meat was juicy but left an oily taste in his mouth. The bun was soft and spongy.

McDonald's. The basic burger was one 3.5-ounce patty with pickle slices, bits of chopped raw onion, and a dab of ketchup and mustard, served on a lightly browned bun. The meat tasted mild and more greasy than beefy. It was easier to bite through than the Five Guys patty and was uniformly round and brownish-gray. The major flavor came from the toppings. The bun was airy and bland.

Bottom line. The Five Guys burger was bigger and beefier but costs about \$5, compared with \$1 for McDonald's. (Five Guys sells a one-patty Little Hamburger for about \$3.50.) And the meat is made to order, not in advance, so we waited 5 to 10 minutes.

▶ CLOSE UP

Our reporter couldn't get his hands on an In-N-Out burger, but readers gave it high marks. "It always seems as though the burger was made moments before," one said, "as opposed to sitting under a heat lamp." The basic burger costs about \$2.

Survey Ratings

We asked 28,000 readers who bought any burger on their last visit to the restaurants below: On a scale of 1 to 10, from least delicious burger you've ever had to most, how would you rate that burger's taste? Differences of fewer than 0.5 points aren't meaningful.

In-N-Out Burger	7.9
Five Guys Burgers and Fries	7.9
Fuddruckers	7.7
Burgerville	7.6
Back Yard Burgers	7.6
Culver's Frozen Custard	7.5
Whataburger	7.3
Hardee's	7.2
Carl's Jr.	6.9
Checkers Drive-In	6.9
White Castle	6.7
Wendy's	6.6
Sonic Drive-In	6.6
A&W Restaurant	6.5
Krystal	6.3
Burger King	6.3
Jack in the Box	6.3
McDonald's	5.6

Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center.





TALK THE TALK

Test your milk IQ

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the Department of Agriculture clarified the amount of time cows that produce organic milk must spend grazing on grass. By July 2011, they must have year-round access to the outdoors, access to pasture during the grazing season, and a specified minimum intake from pasture grown without synthetic herbicides and pesticides. They also must not have been treated with hormones or antibiotics.

Here are other terms to know when you're in the dairy aisle:

Whole milk. It has slightly less than

4 percent fat. One cup has 150 calories, about half from fat, plus vitamin D and about 300 milligrams of calcium. Whole, reduced-fat, and skim milk all provide similar amounts of protein, calcium, and vitamin D.

2 percent milk. A cup has 120 calories, about a third from fat.

1 percent milk. A cup has 100 calories, about a fifth from fat.

Nonfat or skim. A cup has 80 calories, none from fat. And how does a company create fat-free half-and-half? By adding stuff such as corn-syrup solids, artificial

color, and sugar to nonfat milk.

Pasteurized. Milk has been heated to at least 161° F for at least 15 seconds or 145° for 30 minutes.

Ultrapasteurized, aka UHT. Milk has been heated to at least 280° for at least 2 seconds. Ultrapasteurized milk will often have a more "cooked" flavor than pasteurized, according to Cornell University's Department of Food Science, but lasts longer before turning sour.

Raw, aka unpasteurized. Because raw milk can harbor harmful bacteria, the Food and Drug Administration recommends

How to help a child with ADHD

A **CONSUMER REPORTS** survey of 934 parents of children diagnosed with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder reveals strategies for coping with the condition, which affects 3 to 7 percent of school-aged children, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

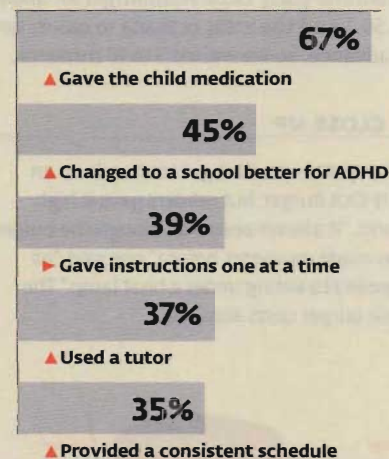
Eighty-four percent of the surveyed parents said that their kids had taken prescription medicine. It helped more than other treatments, parents reported, but only 52 percent of those parents agreed strongly that if they had it to do over, they would have their child take medication. One concern: side effects, which may include decreased appetite,

DID YOU KNOW?

ADHD might seem to be a new condition, but the first official diagnosis is credited to Dr. George Still in a 1902 edition of the British medical journal *The Lancet*.

5 most useful actions

Percentage of parents who said each strategy helped a lot.



Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center.

sleep problems, weight loss, upset stomach, and irritability.

Medication helped more with behavior and performance at school than with social relationships and self-esteem.

Our results showed that older ADHD drugs, which were stimulants, were generally more helpful than the newer, non-stimulant types. Experts recommend that children have a health exam before medication is prescribed and that parents work with doctors to manage any side effects.

Asked what they'd tell other parents of children with ADHD, respondents were most likely to say, "Be prepared for the time it will take to discuss your child's schoolwork and behavior at school with teachers." To avoid common missteps reported in our survey, parents should keep thorough records, advocate for the child, and enlist a reliable, informed team of professionals to create a plan of action for school and home.

against drinking it.

rbGH. Recombinant bovine growth hormone is an artificial, genetically engineered drug designed to increase milk production (by an estimated 10 percent). Its use was approved by the FDA in 1993. Most industrialized nations and all 25 members of the European Union have not approved its use because it can sicken cows. (And Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of CONSUMER REPORTS, has said that rbGH shouldn't be allowed in the U.S.)

Lactose free. Some people can't digest lactose, milk's dominant sugar, because they lack lactase, the enzyme needed to break it down. Lactose intolerance causes gas and diarrhea.

Tryptophan. It's an amino acid in milk that the body turns into sleep-promoting serotonin. Whether there's enough in a glass of milk to aid sleep is debatable.

Soy milk. Plain soy milk has about a third fewer calories than whole milk but similar levels of calcium, protein, and vitamin D; negligible saturated fat; no



▶ DID YOU KNOW?

We bought eight brands of 2 percent milk, four conventional and four organic; poured samples into cups; and had 112 employees taste all the milks. The staffers were no better than random guessers at telling which were organic. That's not surprising, because feed and pasteurization type are apt to play a big role in taste.

cholesterol; and no lactose. If not labeled organic, it probably contains genetically modified soy.

Sell by. Milk should stay fresh for two to five days after this date, according to Cornell University's Department of Food Science, but once opened should be used as soon as possible. Unopened ultrapasteurized milk in sterile (aseptic) packaging can last several months unrefrigerated, but once opened, drink it within 7 to 10 days. The ideal temperature for storing milk is between 34° and 38°, Cornell says.

Source. You can find out where the milk you buy comes from by going to www.wherismymilkfrom.com and typing in a code from the carton.

▶ CLAIM CHECK

Is Mister Steamy a smooth operator?

The claim. "Mister Steamy," a sponge-filled, vented rubber ball, "is the fastest way to get wrinkles out without getting the iron out." You add water to the ball, toss it in the dryer with a few wrinkled items, and as the dryer heats up, water sprinkled by the ball turns to steam. Two balls plus a bottle of fabric softener cost \$19.99 online. Shipping and handling? Shell out another \$13.98.



The check. We washed and dried 11 men's cotton dress shirts, then took two straight from the dryer and put them on hangers. We let the other nine sit overnight under a weight, to leave them good and wrinkled. Then we had a staffer iron one shirt, kept two as controls, and put the other six in the dryer for 15 minutes each. Two were dried with a wet Mister Steamy, two after they were sprayed with water, and two along with a wet towel. Two of our fabric experts then put the shirts in order of, well, wrinkliness.

Bottom line. No need to date Mister Steamy. One of his shirts looked like those taken out of the dryer and hung promptly. The other fared slightly worse. The smoothest look, of course, came after ironing, but if you can't be bothered, take newly washed items out of the dryer fast. To smooth already wrinkled clothes somewhat, toss them in the dryer with a wet towel.

Avoid aching while raking

▶ Before you rake

Choose the right tool. We've found that extra-wide rakes (36 inches) require more downward pressure to drag leaves across a lawn, so we recommend a standard-width (24-inch) rake, ideally one with a soft grip.

Ergonomic rakes, often with a bent handle, are designed to reduce bending but aren't a good fit for everyone. Buy a rake that's comfortable for your height and strength. Before buying, practice raking in the store.

(A speedier alternative to a rake is a leaf blower, which in our competition took half the time to do a similar job.)

▶ In the yard

Wear shoes with slip-resistant soles, and if needed, apply sunscreen and tick repellent.

Put down a medium-sized (about 8x8 feet) tarp, ideally with rope handles, so you can rake leaves onto it, then pull it to the curb.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has these other tips:

- Pick up any debris that could cause you to trip.
- Stretch and warm up for at least 10 minutes.
- Keep space between your hands on the grip to increase leverage. If the rake lacks padded handles, wear gloves.
- Alternate leg and arm positions, and switch sides.
- To pick up leaves, bend at the knees, not the waist.
- Don't overfill leaf bags.
- Don't twist to toss leaves over a shoulder or to the side.
- Put the rake away. Plenty of people are hurt when they step on a rake by mistake.



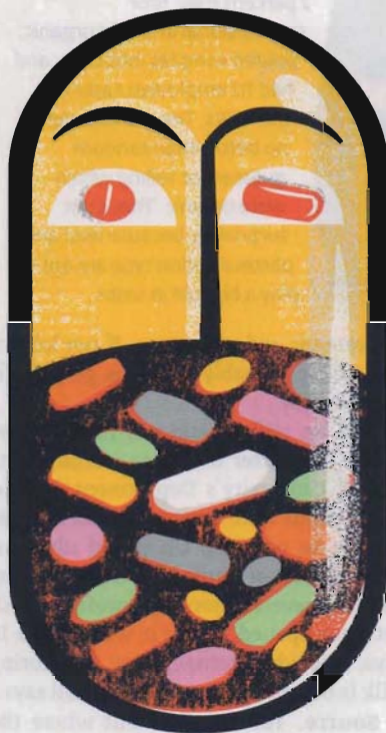
Drug recalls: Ignorance isn't bliss

IN PERHAPS THE LARGEST related series of drug recalls in U.S. history, Johnson & Johnson's McNeil Consumer Healthcare subsidiary has pulled millions of bottles of over-the-counter drugs, including some Tylenol, Benadryl, and Motrin, from pharmacy shelves since September 2009. (These drugs may have manufacturing-quality problems or may have been tainted by a chemical.) However, useful consumer information about recalls may go unreported. What's lacking?

Numbers. The drugmaker typically announces the number of recalled "lots," a manufacturing term with no standard definition. The FDA can't force a company to disclose to the public specifics about the number of tablets, bottles, or people affected. It also lacks the power of the Consumer Product Safety Commission and National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration, both of which can force a recall.

Location. The manufacturer is not required to tell the public which retail stores sold the drugs, although announcements often reveal the state and country.

Timeliness. When a prescription drug is recalled, many pharmacies and membership stores can contact each affected customer. But for over-the-counter drugs, consumers often have to rely on media reports, dig through FDA or manufacturer websites, or ask a pharmacist. For the recent recalls, Johnson & Johnson provides



information at 888-222-6036 and at www.mcneilproductrecall.com.

Drug manufacturers usually release their own recall announcements. The FDA then reposts those releases. However, we found a potential timing issue. In a recent recall of free samples of the prescription blood thinner Coumadin (warfarin), the manufacturer seems to have initiated a

recall well before the company's news release was posted. The company sent a letter to health-care practitioners dated June 25, but the public release was dated July 12. The FDA reposted the release on the 12th and posted its own safety alert on the 14th.

What you can do

Use one pharmacy for all drugs. And tell your pharmacist when you buy an over-the-counter drug, says Carmen Catizone, R.P.H., executive director of the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. The pharmacy can track your medications and prevent interactions, plus alert you to any recall, especially of an OTC drug.

Inspect medication. If pills have an unusual odor, are stuck together, or are shaped oddly, return them to the pharmacy.

Be vigilant. If you hear about a recall, see whether you're taking the drug in question. Go to www.fda.gov and ConsumerReportsHealth.org for recall announcements or ask your pharmacist.

Get notified automatically. Go to www.recalls.gov to sign up for e-mail alerts from all government safety agencies.

Support stronger rules. In mid-July, Congressman Edolphus Towns (D-N.Y.) introduced a bill that would give the FDA mandatory recall authority for drugs and require manufacturers to notify the agency when they believe drugs in interstate commerce are misbranded or adulterated and could cause serious harm or death.

QUICK TIPS



PHILL ILLUSTRATION BY WATT FOSTER WIPER ILLUSTRATION BY MCKIBBILLO

Windshield-wiper care

It's easy to forget that wipers are a safety feature—until you end up driving in heavy rain or snow, or are blinded by glare. Dirt, debris, and road grime abrade wipers, and sunlight breaks down their rubber edges. Most wipers, our tests have shown, deteriorate after six to nine months, so if you replaced yours around the first of the year, it's time to do it again.

Check their condition. Lift each wiper arm off the glass and run your finger along its rubber edge. If the rubber is rigid or chipped, or produces nonstop streaking, you need new wipers.

Keep them clean. Put windshield washer

fluid or mild dish liquid on a damp sponge or rag and wipe debris off the rubber and the windshield where the wiper rests.

Keep them free. If wipers are frozen to the glass, use the defroster and hand-clear snow and ice from around them before turning them on. Use windshield washer fluid with antifreeze.

Replace them in pairs. If one is worn out, its mate will surely die soon.

Get the correct size and type. Look in your car's owner's manual, measure the blade, or ask at an auto-parts store. On some cars, one blade is longer than the



Small steps toward safer chicken

In tests conducted over the past dozen years, CONSUMER REPORTS has consistently found campylobacter and salmonella—the leading bacterial causes of foodborne illness—in fresh, store-bought broilers. Finally, the government is taking steps that we've been advocating to help prevent tens of thousands of human illnesses annually.

In May, the Department of Agriculture proposed new rules for poultry processors that it estimates would prevent 65,000 foodborne illnesses a year. The standards aim to reduce salmonella in broilers and turkeys and, for the first time, establish limits for campylobacter. The USDA will publish names of plants that don't meet the revised salmonella standards and will consider naming establishments that don't meet the new campylobacter standards.

In June, the Food and Drug Administration recommended steps that would limit the use of some antibiotic drugs in chickens and other food animals. The goal: to reduce the emergence of bacteria that become resistant to antibiotics used in people.

Bottom line. These are good steps, but they don't go far enough. Our tests have shown that some companies can achieve lower levels of salmonella and campylobacter than those the USDA has set. And the FDA's antibiotic recommendations have no teeth.

other, so check both, as well as the rear wiper if your car has one.

Pull, then push. Usually you just pull the old wiper off the metal arm and push the new one on until it's tight. You might need a small screwdriver or hammer to tap the old blade off.

Rethink refills. Replacing the rubber part of the wiper with a new insert saves money but requires deft use of needle-nose pliers. It's often better to replace the whole blade.

Choose right. We've found the Valeo 600 Series (\$15 per wiper) and RainX Latitude (\$21) best overall. Other good choices: the Anco 31 Series (\$10) and Contour (\$16), Michelin RainForce (\$12), and Valeo 900 Series (\$20). Prices are for 24-inch models.

Where to find lost loot

THANKS TO A WEALTH of databases, it's easier to find forgotten property.

To search for property held by states. Go to www.missingmoney.com, affiliated with the National Association of State Treasurers. It has records from at least 35 states. Try searching all of the states in which you or your relative has ever lived. There's no time limit for claiming those assets.

To search for matured savings bonds. For bonds dating from 1974 or for missed payments from U.S. Treasury securities, go to www.treasurydirect.gov/indiv/indiv.htm. Click on "Search for Your Securities in Treasury Hunt." For older bonds or those still drawing interest, go to www.treasurydirect.gov; click on the "Forms" tab, then download 1048, used for lost, stolen, or destroyed savings bonds.

To find a lost 401(k) plan. Start at www.unclaimedretirementbenefits.com, where plan sponsors, administrators, and custodians register missing partic-

ipants who have unclaimed retirement funds. If that doesn't work and you've lost track of your old company, see the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp.'s booklet "Finding a Lost Pension." To look for an abandoned plan, go to the Department of Labor's database at www.askebsa.dol.gov/abandonedplansearch.

If you think a deceased loved one had a life-insurance policy. Go to www.missingmoney.com. For more tips, go to the American Council of Life Insurers' website, at www.acli.com, and click on "Missing Policy Tips" under "Tools."

If you're waiting for a refund from the current tax year. Go to www.irs.gov; click on "Where's My Refund?"

If you find funds that are yours. The fiduciary that holds them will provide specific instructions on how to claim them. You'll need proof of your identity. If the property belonged to a deceased relative or friend, you'll also have to prove that you're the executor of the estate or the rightful heir.

CLAIM CHECK

Hair today, gone tomorrow

The claim. The Pledge Fabric Sweeper for Pet Hair has two lint-collecting, fabric-covered rollers that work together to "grab, lift, and trap hair inside." They're designed to work on pillows, bedspreads, car interiors, chairs, and such. We paid \$5.59 for ours.

The check. Our tester enlisted three friends: Jade, a mixed-breed dog, and Precious and Rexy, tabby cats. To collect the copious hair they shed, we used the Pledge sweeper and three other devices: a Scotch Lint Roller, with layered, sticky, disposable sheets; a Scotch Pet Hair Roller, which works the same way; and a Scotch Fur Fighter Hair Remover, a handle to which a disposable, flexible sheet is attached.

Bottom line. Take the Pledge. It worked fast to push lots of hair into the chamber behind the brushes. The other devices required constant stopping and replacement of sheets, and no single sheet collected much hair. Drawbacks for Pledge: It didn't work well with very loose fabric, and heavy hair sometimes built up between the rollers (but was easily removed). Pledge says the Sweeper is disposable, but we suggest reusing it. Just unsnap a roller, remove the collected hair, and snap the roller back in place.



ON A ROLL Pledge Fabric Sweeper's rollers send hair into a plastic container.

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Acura TL Base V6 New: 2010	Lexus ES 350 V6 New: 2010
sedan	sedan
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\$35,105 - \$38,855 Price This Car	\$34,800 - \$34,800 Price This Car
Front or AWD	Front
2 front, 3 rear	2 front, 3 rear
3.5-liter V6 (280 hp) 3.7-liter V6 (305 hp)	3.5-liter V6 (272 hp)
5-speed automatic, 6-speed manual	6-speed automatic
2009 Best sedan, 3.5-liter V6, 5-speed automatic	2007 Best sedan, 3.5-liter V6, 6-speed automatic
Bridgestone Turanza EL400, size P245/50R17 95V	Bridgestone Turanza EL400, size P245/50R17 95V

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RECALLS

AUTOMOBILES

'00-'04 Toyota Avalon

Due to a defect, the steering lock bar could break. That might cause the steering wheel to lock, posing a risk of crash.



MODELS: 373,000 '00-'04 Avalons.

WHAT TO DO: Toyota will replace the steering column bracket free of charge. Call 800-331-4331 for details.

'03-'04 Honda Accord, Civic, and Element

The interlock lever of the ignition switch might deform, interfering with the operation of the automatic transmission. Removal of the ignition key in a vehicle with an automatic transmission without shifting to Park can allow the vehicle to roll away, posing a risk of crash.

MODELS: 384,220 '03 Accords and Civics and '03-'04 Elements.

WHAT TO DO: Dealer will remove original lever within ignition switch and replace it free of charge. Call Honda at 800-999-1009 for details.

OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT

Toro snow blowers

The carburetor needle may corrode and stick in the open position, allowing fuel to leak, which poses a risk of fire.

PRODUCTS: 35,700 Power Clear 180 single-stage snow blowers sold at Toro dealers and Home Depot from November 2009 through May 2010 for \$400 to \$440. Toro has had 2,200 reports of carburetor leaks but no reports of fires.

WHAT TO DO: Contact an authorized Toro service dealer to arrange for a free repair. For more information, call Toro at 877-738-4440 or go to www.toro.com.



HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES

'Square D' circuit breakers

Circuit breakers labeled "Square D" or "SQD" are counterfeit and can fail to trip when they're overloaded, posing a risk of fire.

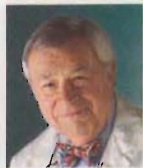
PRODUCTS: 43,600 "Square D" circuit breakers sold at electrical product distributors and wholesalers nationwide from March 2005 through July 2006. Single pole breakers were \$3 to \$4 and double pole breakers were \$8 to \$9. Recalled model numbers include QO115, QO120, QO130, QO215, QO220, QO230, QO240, QO250, and QO260.

WHAT TO DO: Contact the distributor, Miami Breaker, at 800-941-1112 to determine whether the circuit breaker is counterfeit and, if necessary, to arrange a free inspection and replacement.



5-MINUTE CONSULT

Brittle bones: What to do



Marvin Lipman, M.D., clinical professor of medicine emeritus at New York Medical College, is Consumers Union's chief medical adviser.

RECENTLY, a 65-year-old retired math teacher asked whether she really had to take the bone-building drug prescribed by her gynecologist because of an abnormal T-score on a bone densitometry test. "And what's a T-score anyway?" she asked. She had heard a lot about the side effects of those drugs,

such as heartburn, ulcers, weakened jawbones, and, paradoxically, leg fractures. She was very leery of embarking on a relationship of five or more years with Fosamax, even though it's available in a less costly, generic version (alendronate).

She showed me her bone-densitometry test results. I noted that the bone-density measurement at her hip site was -2.6, which classifies that joint as osteoporotic, according to a somewhat arbitrary rating system designed by the World Health Organization. A T-score of 1.0 is normal; a score of -1.1 to -2.4 indicates osteopenia (mild bone loss, which is not a disease); a score of -2.5 or greater defines osteoporosis, or brittle bone disease.

Direct-to-consumer ads

The diagnosis of osteoporosis was once made on the basis of the "washed out" appearance of the bone on an X-ray or via an actual bone biopsy. In the late 1980s, the advent of dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) paved the way for a class of drugs called bisphosphonates (such as Actonel, Boniva, and Fosamax). Those drugs



were approved not only to treat osteoporosis but also to prevent it. Direct-to-consumer ads proliferated, urging patients to be tested and treated. Some makers of popular bone drugs subsidized the rental of DEXA (or DXA) units for practitioners' offices.

But DEXA results were not the only way to determine a fracture risk. Beyond the usual predictors of age (older than 65), gender (female), race (Asian or Caucasian), low weight, and previous fracture, there were current smoking habits, previous use of corticosteroids, family history of fracture, excessive alcohol use, and rheumatoid arthritis. Additional risk factors included vitamin D deficiency, thyroid or parathyroid hyperfunction, and celiac disease. Factor in causes of repeated falls, such as poor balance and muscle weakness, and you can see that DEXA measurements can often be just one of myriad predictors.

Such was the case with my patient, the math teacher. Except for the T-score of -2.6, she had no risk factors for future fractures. Using a computer tool called

FRAX (www.sheffield.ac.uk/frax), developed by the World Health Organization, I was quickly able to determine her 10-year fracture probability. Despite her ominous T-score, according to the FRAX calculation, the likelihood of her having a fracture was only 2.9 percent over the next decade.

Considering her aversion to taking medication and noting studies that determined that cost-effective treatment to prevent future fractures was warranted when the probability was 3 percent or greater, I decided that medication wasn't necessary now. I made sure that her daily calcium and vitamin D intake were adequate, stressed the importance of weight-bearing exercise, and asked her to return in one year for another bone-density test.

How to strengthen bones and prevent fractures

- Eat calcium-rich foods such as green leafy vegetables, low-fat dairy products, shellfish, canned sardines, and salmon, and take supplements as directed by your doctor, to make sure you're getting at least 1,200 milligrams of calcium per day.
- Check your vitamin D blood level. It should be greater than 30 nanograms per milliliter; supplement your diet as directed by your doctor.
- Spend 30 minutes or more each day doing weight-bearing exercises such as walking and weightlifting to support bones and increase muscle strength.
- Do a safety check of your home, which is where most falls occur.
- Learn tai chi or similar exercises to improve balance, and use a cane if necessary.

DID YOU KNOW?

E-mailing doctors improves care

People with diabetes or hypertension, or both, who e-mail their physicians about the ups and downs of their test results and other aspects of their care appear far more likely to undergo screening tests and keep their blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood-sugar levels under control compared with those who don't e-mail their doctors, according to a study of

35,423 patients published in the July 2010 issue of the journal *Health Affairs*.

The researchers, at Kaiser Permanente, could not control for some variables, such as education. Still, e-mailing was associated with more effective care, probably because it gave patients greater access to their doctors, who could adjust medications or recommend other

treatments if needed.

Before messaging your doctor, ask whether he or she is willing to discuss your case by e-mail and has a secure e-mail system. To further protect your privacy, use your personal e-mail, not your employer's system. E-mail succinct questions about tests, treatments, or referrals, but for emergencies call 911.

Will you have enough to retire?

IF YOU CAN'T answer that question, you're in good, or at least plentiful, company these days. Just 46 percent of U.S. workers say they or their spouses have tried to calculate how much they need to save for a comfortable retirement, according to a recent survey by the nonprofit Employee Benefit Research Institute in Washington, D.C. And 14 percent of that group admit to guessing.

Even if you never plan to retire fully, or the day is still decades off, having more than a guess about how much money you'd need can help you avoid some unpleasant surprises years from now. "It may sound like a lot of work," says Steve Vernon, an actuary and blogger on retirement topics in Oxnard, Calif., "but it's worth it given that you're planning the rest of your life."

It doesn't have to be a lot of work if you shoot for an approximate number rather than try to account for every possible variable. With all the unpredictable factors involved, including future inflation rates and investment returns, as well as your own longevity, an approximation may be the best you'll do anyway. Here's how to come up with one.

Figure your future expenses

Many people assume their expenses will wane in retirement, and financial planners commonly use a multiplier such as 70 or 80 percent for a quick estimate. In reality, new retirees often find that their expenses rise at first, as they indulge pent-up fantasies such as travel and redecorating. Health-care costs can also be a factor. For that reason, Mari Adam, a certified financial planner in Boca Raton, Fla., says your retirement expenses could be closer to 100 percent of your pre-retirement ones.

DID YOU KNOW?

2.8%

That's the average annual cost-of-living increase for Social Security recipients from 2000 to now. Since 1975, increases have ranged from 0 percent in December 2009 to 14.3 percent in 1980.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON SEIFFER



For a more precise estimate, Adam suggests tracking your current expenses on a worksheet. Cross off any costs you expect to go away, such as commuting, and add whatever new ones you anticipate. If you're close to retirement, you might try living on that new budget for a while, just to be sure it's a comfortable fit.

In addition to everyday expenses, allow for the occasional budget buster, such as a new roof or furnace. As Vernon points out, if you're retired for 20 or 30 years, you could easily need two or three new cars, so budget for those, too.

Tally your monthly income

If you contribute to Social Security, you should get an estimate of your future benefits in the mail every year. It shows how much you'd probably collect if you claimed benefits at age 62, at your "full" retirement age (currently 67 for anyone born in 1960 or later), and at age 70. Use the Retirement Estimator at www.ssa.gov to see what you might collect under different scenarios.

Traditional, defined-benefit pension plans are increasingly rare, but if you're eligible for one from an employer or union, find out from the plan trustee how much monthly income it will provide you. Add up your income from all sources and compare it with your probable expenses. If that income alone can cover the bills, you're all set. If not, you'll need to narrow the gap.

Many of the big financial-services companies, such as Fidelity Investments and T. Rowe Price, have free online calculators that can assist in that exercise. If you want to start with a relatively simple one, Adam and Vernon recommend Ballpark E\$timate, at www.choosetosave.org.

Solve your shortfall

If your income falls short, you'll need to tap your investments. Financial planners often use 4 percent as a conservative estimate of how much money you can take from your assets each year with minimal risk of depleting them. So, for example, for every \$100,000 you have in 401(k) plans, IRAs, or other investments, you could count on \$4,000 a year, or about \$333 a month. You can adjust the amount a bit each year to account for inflation.

If your shortfall is \$1,000 a month, or \$12,000 a year, you'll need to save about \$300,000 by the time you retire. If that's unrealistic, you might want to go back to your worksheet and cut some costs. You could also consider part-time work during retirement. Or you might postpone retirement by a couple of years and save like crazy in the meantime.

The closer you get to retirement, the more accurate your estimates are likely to be. Adam and Vernon suggest revisiting those calculations every year or so or when your life changes in a major way.



VERDICT Store brand. Both products have a distinct orange flavor and are moderately sweet, but our trained tasters reported that the Publix juice has a bit less of a cooked (or processed) flavor and is slightly less bitter than the Tropicana.

Store brands vs. name brands

In our latest taste-off, store-brand foods were often at least as good

ANY SMART supermarket shopper knows that buying store-brand products instead of big names can save big bucks. In our latest price study (see page 21), filling a shopping cart with store brands saved us an average of 30 percent. If you spend \$100 a week on groceries, those savings add up to more than \$1,500 a year.

Yet some shoppers are still reluctant to try store-brand products. The top reasons from our recent nationally representative survey: "I prefer name brands," "The name

brand tastes better," and "I don't know if store brands are as high in quality." Respondents 18 to 39 years old were particularly likely to question the quality of store brands.

Shoppers are quite leery of some categories. Although they'll snap up store-brand paper goods and plastics, at least half of our survey respondents rarely or never buy store-brand wine, pet food, soda, or soup. That may be especially true when the category includes a name-brand superstar such as Coca-Cola or Campbell's.

The message from our latest taste-off: Don't be reluctant to give any private-label product a try. In fact, our results may knock some of those iconic brands off their pedestals. Albertsons peanut butter was similar in quality to Skippy; Target's Market Pantry ketchup was as good as Heinz.

Overall, national brands won seven of the 21 matchups and store brands won three. For the rest, the store brand and name brand were of similar quality. A tie doesn't mean the taste was identical. Two products may be equally fresh and flavor-

ful, with ingredients of similar quality, but taste very different because ingredients or seasonings differ. A case in point is ketchup. In Heinz, the spices stand out; Market Pantry is more tomatoey.

Although 17 percent of our survey respondents said that “name-brand foods are more nutritious,” we found nutrition similar for most of the tested products. The most notable differences: Mott’s apple sauce has more sugar than Publix, Ore-Ida fries have more sodium than Jewel, and Kellogg’s Froot Loops have 3 grams of fiber vs. 1 gram in Stop & Shop Fruit Swirls.

There’s no reason store brands shouldn’t hold their own against the big boys. After all, some of the same companies manufacture both. Among the big names that also make store-brand products: Sara Lee (baked goods), Reynolds (wraps, storage containers), 4C (bread crumbs, iced tea, soup mixes), McCormick (seasonings, extracts, sauces, gravies), Feit (lightbulbs), Manischewitz (frozen appetizers, soup mixes, side dishes), Joy Cone (ice cream cones), Stonewall Kitchen (gourmet condiments, specialty foods), and Royal Oak (charcoal).

Two examples of a different type of store brand—“second tier” brands, which may cost even less—fared worse in our tests. We tasted second-tier Kroger Value Sandwich Singles Imitation Pasteurized Process Cheese Food and Shoppers Value creamy peanut butter, bought at Albertsons. Testers said the Kroger faux cheese is inferior to Kraft and regular Kroger singles. It’s salty and chalky, with the artificial-butter aroma common in microwavable popcorn. The Shoppers Value peanut butter is so-so, with off-notes (raw-nut

flavor) and a bit of bitterness, probably from peanut skins. Those flaws were noticeable even when the peanut butter was spread on bread. Many chains sell second-tier brands, including A&P (under the names Savings Plus and Smart Price), Safeway (Basic Red), Stop & Shop (Guaranteed Value), and Food Lion (Smart Option).

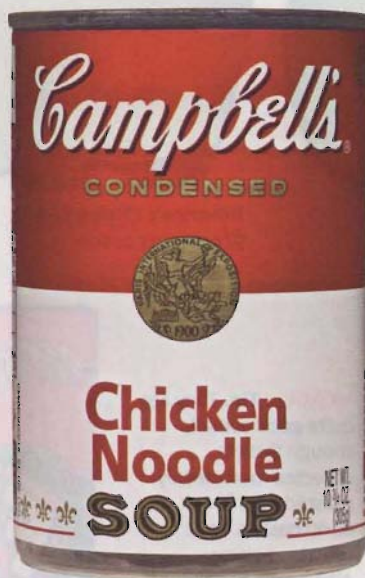
Bottom line. Almost any store-brand product is worth a try. There’s little risk: Most grocers offer a money-back guaran-

tee if their products don’t meet your expectations. (National brands often give unsatisfied buyers coupons, but the process might take a while.) And there’s plenty of opportunity for reward. “The secret’s out,” says Lisa Rider, vice president of retail consulting solutions for Nielsen, the marketing-information company. “Store brands are just as good. Store-brand buyers are no longer seen as cheapskates but as savvy shoppers.”

Taste-test results

In blind tests, our trained tasters evaluated 21 pairs of staple foods. National brands won seven times; store brands, three. There were 11 ties. Prices are based on an average of what we found. The store brands cost 7 to 60 percent less.

▶ Store-brand winners



Campbell's
41 cents per serving



Food Lion
36 cents per serving

VERDICT Food Lion. These soups have soft, almost mushy noodles. Food Lion's flavors are a little more intense, the dehydrated spice taste is not as pronounced, and the soup doesn't leave as much of a fatty feeling in the mouth. The Campbell's broth is oily, with fatty pieces of chicken, and it leaves a lingering taste of garlic powder.

▶ DID YOU KNOW?

84%

That's the percentage of Americans who have bought store brands in the past year, based on a recent survey of 1,727 shoppers by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. And 93 percent said they would keep buying as many store brands after the economy recovers. Nationwide, store brands accounted for almost one of four products sold in supermarkets and a record \$55.5 billion in sales last year.

VERDICT America's Choice. The A&P franks are juicy and full of flavor, with a pleasing blend of garlic and slight smokiness. The Oscar Mayer franks are OK, though slightly ashy-tasting and rubbery. Both are salty.



Oscar Mayer
\$3.65 per package

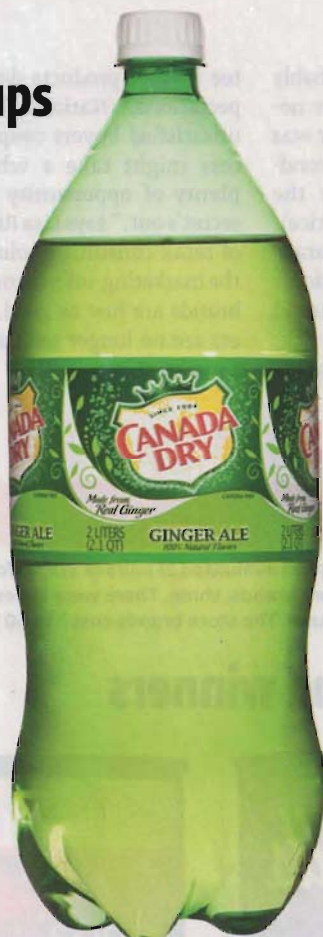


America's Choice (A&P)
\$2.64 per package

▶ Toss-ups

VERDICT Tie.

They're good and are similar enough in quality and style that most people probably couldn't tell them apart. They have a mild ginger ale flavor with a short finish (the taste doesn't linger).



Canada Dry
\$1.76 per bottle



America's Choice (A&P)
97 cents per bottle



Kraft
\$1.04 per box



Fred Meyer
50 cents per box

VERDICT Tie. Differences are minimal. They have a mild, cheddarlike powdered-cheese sauce that gave a slight artificial-butter flavor (think microwave popcorn) to the al dente pasta cooked by our foods technicians. If anything, the Kraft is milder.

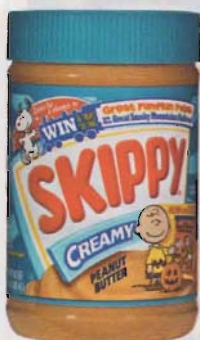


Kraft
\$3.20 per package



Kroger
\$2.52 per package

VERDICT Tie. There were lot-to-lot variations within the brands, but they would probably go unnoticed in a sandwich. The cheeses are soft, mushy, and pasty.



Skippy
19 cents per serving



Albertsons
15 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. They are quite good overall, though tasters detected more deeply roasted nuts (think dark toast vs. light toast) in Skippy. Albertsons has a hint of molasses flavor.

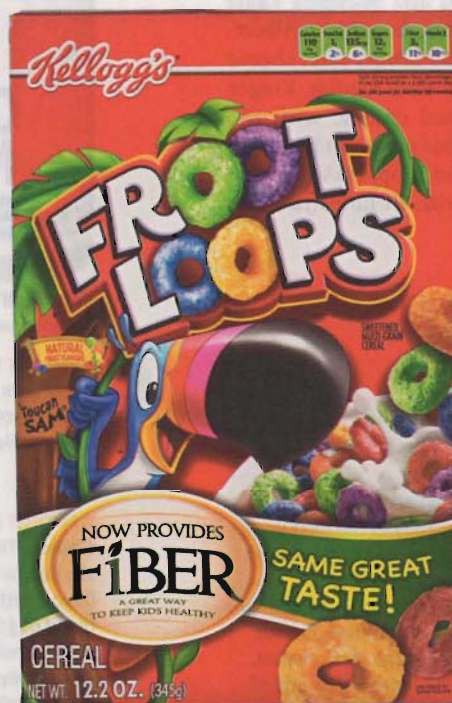
VERDICT Tie. They have full-dairy flavors and are very good overall. Dannon is slightly sweeter; Food Lion, a bit more tangy, with more real-vanilla flavor.



Dannon
\$3.14 per container



Food Lion
\$1.99 per container



Kellogg's
\$3.69 per box



Stop & Shop
\$2.60 per box



Dole
\$1.66 per can



Safeway
\$1.23 per can

VERDICT Tie. They're similar in overall quality but fluctuate in color, texture, and flavor from lot to lot and even within the same can (as you'd expect with a natural product). The Dole slices were slightly more sour and acidic.



Jell-O
\$3.10 per package



Fred Meyer
\$2.49 per package

VERDICT Tie. These puddings are thick, dense, and cocoa-flavored. They're slightly gummy and chalky, and the Fred Meyer is also a bit gelatinous.



Lay's
29 cents per serving

VERDICT Tie. These chips have a nice balance of real potato flavor, fat, and saltiness. They are crisp and have no off-notes. The Great Value chips are slightly less salty, a tad more toasty and earthy in flavor, and a touch bitter—perfectly acceptable in a potato chip.



Great Value (Walmart)
15 cents per serving



VERDICT Tie. They are crispy and sugar-coated, with pronounced artificial fruit flavors that kids may love but that reminded our tasters of lemon-scented household cleaner. Fruit Swirls tasted slightly stale. Froot Loops leave a vitaminlike aftertaste, and when tasters added milk, they noticed a slick, waxy residue in the milk and on the bowl and spoon. Kellogg's spokeswoman Susanne Norwitz cited a "flavor coating commonly used on cereal, which has a light oil base" as the probable cause.



Mott's
\$1.96 per jar



Publix
\$1.59 per jar

VERDICT Tie. These are quite good and have a fairly smooth texture. They're slightly sweet and a touch sour, with distinct apple flavor. But that flavor differs, probably because of different apple varieties.



Heinz
\$2.76 per bottle



Market Pantry (Target)
\$1.74 per bottle

VERDICT Tie. Tomatoes are about the only attribute these two have in common, so the choice comes down to personal preference. Heinz is spicier, with distinct Worcestershire notes. Market Pantry has mostly tomato flavor, which comes through precisely because it's not as spicy. The flavor differences are apparent straight from the bottle or with fries.

▶ Name-brand winners



Oscar Mayer
\$3.70 per package



Stop & Shop
\$3 per package

VERDICT Oscar Mayer. Neither resembles roast turkey breast carved from the bone, but Oscar Mayer's is clearly better. It's readily identifiable as turkey: moist and slightly chewy, with salty and brothy flavors. It also has better overall texture. The Stop & Shop turkey consists of very pink, wet slices of salty, rubbery meat that's more like ham.



Sargento
\$3.24 per package



America's Choice (A&P)
\$2.55 per package

VERDICT Sargento. For snacking out of the bag or topping a pizza, Sargento is the clear winner because of its clean taste and fresh-dairy flavor. America's Choice is OK but leaves a slightly chalky feeling in the mouth and has some off-tastes.



Birds Eye
\$1.90 per package



Wegmans
90 cents per package

VERDICT Birds Eye. Although these two are bright green and similar in texture, the Birds Eye peas are sweeter and taste fresher.



Hellmann's
7 cents per serving



Jewel
5 cents per serving

VERDICT Hellmann's. It's smooth and moderately thick, fresher-tasting, and more flavorful, with a nice combination of saltiness and a tangy vinegar note. Jewel is milder overall.



Ore-Ida
\$3.91 per bag



Jewel
\$1.99 per bag

VERDICT Ore-Ida. They're crisp, tender, and good enough to eat out of the oven without condiments. Unlike the Jewel fries, the Ore-Ida fries retain their potato flavor even when they're slathered in ketchup. The Jewel fries are less crisp.



Land O'Lakes
\$4.52 per package



Wegmans
\$1.94 per package

VERDICT Land O'Lakes. The name brand wins, but not by much. When these butters were spread on bread, there wasn't much difference; when sampled on their own, the Land O'Lakes was slightly better. They are mild, though the Wegmans borders on bland and lacks a touch of sweet-cream flavor evident in the Land O'Lakes.



Bumble Bee
\$1.06 per can



Market Pantry (Target)
76 cents per can

VERDICT Bumble Bee. It's flavorful and is the clear winner. Two of three lots of the Market Pantry had barely any identifiable tuna flavor and suffered from off-tastes that were tinny or reminiscent of diesel fuel and that even mayonnaise couldn't totally mask.

Store brands saved us up to 52 percent

Industry experts say that store brands usually cost about 25 percent less than their national-brand counterparts. We say you can save even more.

Reporter Tod Marks visited five supermarket chains (A&P, Pathmark, ShopRite, Stop & Shop, and Walmart) in New York and New Jersey and compared store- and name-brand prices for 30 items, from cotton swabs to pepper. Marks obtained four or five price quotes for each item, collecting 283 quotes in all.

The average savings with store brands was 30 percent. For 10 of the products, Marks would have saved at least 35 percent. Prices in the chart were in effect the day he visited and include discounts through instant coupons and savings cards. National brands are generally pricier, not so much because of what's in the package but because of the cost of developing the product and turning it into a household name.

Marks encountered wide price

differences for the same items from one store to another. There was a 40 percent spread between the cheapest and costliest half-gallon of Ocean Spray cranberry juice, for example, and Marks found similar gaps for McCormick pepper, Wish-Bone salad dressing, Crisco oil, Kellogg's raisin bran, Barilla pasta, Kraft mozzarella, and Breakstone's sour cream.

The price difference was even wider among store brands—as high as 63 percent, for salad dressings. The moral: Shop around, wait for sales, use a savings card, and clip coupons.

Despite the savings Marks scored, the price advantage may be narrowing. In recent years, some national-brand makers have lowered prices and stepped up promotional activities, a tactic that hasn't escaped eagle-eyed consumers. In a survey by the Nielsen Co., 58 percent of Americans in 2009 agreed with the statement "store brands are a good value for the money." A year earlier, 67 percent agreed.

In order of savings with store brands.

Product	Name brand	Store brand	Savings
Pretzel twists	\$2.91	\$1.41	52%
Steak sauce	4.05	2.21	45
Cotton swabs	3.53	1.98	44
Canned orange segments	2.07	1.22	41
Bread crumbs	2.03	1.22	40
Sour cream	2.20	1.33	40
Baked beans	1.71	1.06	38
Cream cheese	2.15	1.35	37
Granulated sugar	4.14	2.65	36
Pancake syrup	3.45	2.25	35
Pancake mix	2.84	1.88	34
Grape jelly	2.47	1.65	33
Spicy brown mustard	2.77	1.86	33
Shredded mozzarella	3.39	2.33	31
Dry pasta	1.24	0.87	30
Creamy peanut butter	2.85	2.05	28
Raisin bran cereal	3.65	2.63	28
Crescent rolls	2.71	1.98	27
Butter quarters	4.03	3.03	25
Aluminum foil	8.47	6.54	23
Quick rice	2.55	1.97	23
Chocolate-flavored syrup	4.13	3.22	22
Canola oil	4.28	3.34	22
Sugar substitute	2.70	2.11	22
Zippered sandwich bags	2.55	1.99	22
Dry-roasted peanuts	3.53	2.79	21
Half & half (quart)	3.24	2.57	21
Salad dressing	2.55	2.02	21
Ground black pepper	2.04	1.74	15
Cranberry juice cocktail	2.82	2.42	14
ALL PRODUCTS	93.05	65.67	30

Other products worth trying

We combed through past reports to find the highest-rated store brands in a dozen additional product categories. All items are still being sold.

AA BATTERIES
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Very good



BREAD
365 Touch of Honey Organic (Whole Foods) Very good



CEREAL
Great Value Raisin Bran (Walmart) Very good

CHARDONNAY
Trackers Crossing 365 2008 (Whole Foods) Very good

CHICKEN NUGGETS
Kirkland Signature Disney (Costco) Very good



COMPACT FLUORESCENT LIGHTBULBS
EcoSmart 14-watt 423599 (Home Depot) Excellent



FOOD BAGS
Great Value Slider (Walmart) Very good

FREEZER BAGS
Up & Up Slider (Target) Excellent for strength



ICE CREAM
Archer Farms Belgian Chocolate (Target) Excellent



PAPER TOWELS
Walgreens Ultra Quilted Very good

SUNSCREENS
Up & Up Continuous Spray SPF 30 (Target) Excellent



TOILET PAPER
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Very good

Saving energy

What you can do, and what lawmakers and regulators should do

YOU'VE BOUGHT more energy-efficient lightbulbs and appliances, and you've insulated your attic. You run the A/C less and even line dry your clothes whenever possible. And you're not alone. Energy consumption per capita in 2009 dipped to its lowest level in 41 years. So why do Americans still use more energy than people in most other countries and twice as much as the average European? That's what we wanted to know.

We started by surveying 1,536 American homeowners about their experiences becoming more energy efficient. Turns out that it's harder than it should be. Though the Energy Star program has saved people billions in utility bills, it should and could deliver even greater savings, as our lab tests continue to show. And government rebate programs, designed to encourage energy-efficient choices, are too complicated and confusing for many consumers.

Along with respondents to our nationally representative consumer survey, we heard from government officials, advocates, and industry experts. Many commended the current administration for

making energy efficiency a priority. But there was agreement that strong follow-through is needed—even before a comprehensive energy bill was left for dead on the Senate floor this summer.

We could fill this magazine with an analysis of U.S. energy policy. But in the interest of, well, efficiency, we've limited our report to five key steps that are necessary to help make the U.S. a global leader in energy efficiency and conservation. We've also included seven simple ways you can start saving energy and money today, as well as our latest findings on lighting, water heaters, and more.

Strengthen Energy Star standards

The 18-year-old Energy Star program, which is jointly administered by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy, has announced some significant improvements in the last year. Manufacturers will no longer be able to certify their own products. Instead, the government will require energy-use testing of products by an approved, accredited lab. The DOE has also

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stepped up its compliance enforcement. We have been requesting those two changes for years.

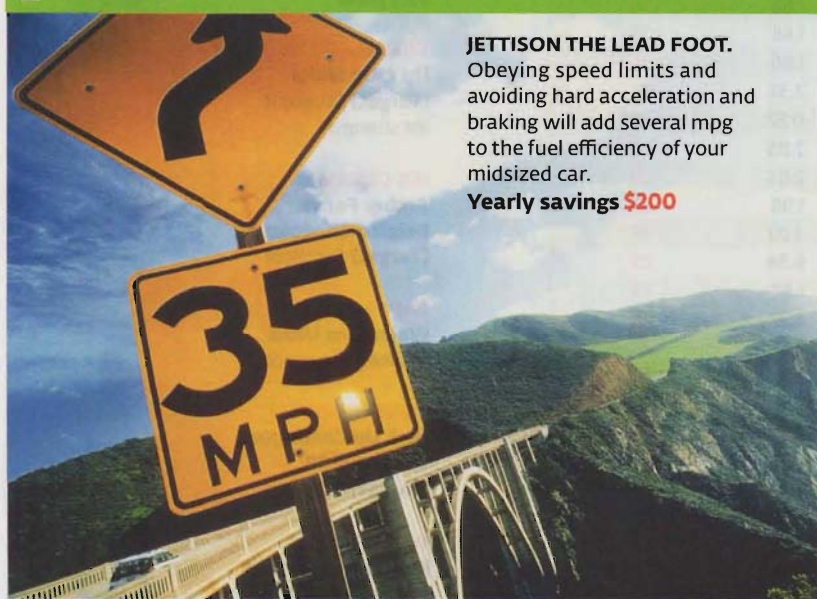
Now we would like to see the same rigor applied to Energy Star qualifications, which were designed to help shoppers identify the top 25 percent of efficient products in a category. That bar has fallen woefully low over time. For example, roughly three-quarters of TVs, dishwashers, and dehumidifiers qualified for Energy Star in 2009.

The EPA doesn't necessarily think that's a problem. In interviews and postings on its website, it has stated that increasing the market share of energy-efficient appliances isn't a flaw.

It's good news that products have become more energy efficient. But when many or most of the products in a category qualify for the Energy Star, it makes it harder, not easier, for consumers to identify the truly exceptional products. Nor does it create incentive for manufacturers to improve efficiency or highlight their most efficient products. To encourage the latter, the EPA is considering a new label, Super Star, which would highlight the top 5 percent of products in a category. But unless the program is carefully administered, it could cause consumer confusion, while requiring more monitoring and enforcement. And given the government's history with Energy Star, officials would need to be vigilant that Super Star would single out only the top 5 percent.

The EPA should keep its focus on toughening Energy Star qualifications. When more than 35 percent of all products sold

▣ SIMPLE STEP

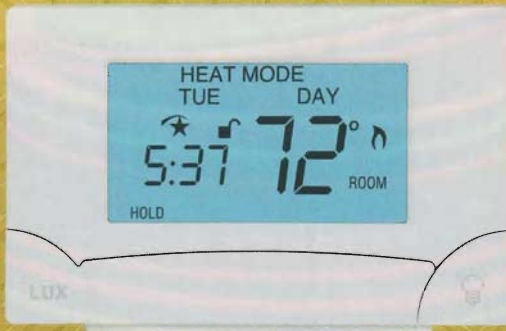


JETTISON THE LEAD FOOT.

Obeying speed limits and avoiding hard acceleration and braking will add several mpg to the fuel efficiency of your midsize car.

Yearly savings \$200

▶ SIMPLE STEP



PROGRAM YOUR THERMOSTAT. You can trim up to 20 percent from your heating and cooling bills by adjusting temperatures 5 to 10 degrees at night or when you're not home. A programmable thermostat will make the setbacks for you. Devices cost about \$80, and some utilities offer rebates. **Yearly savings \$200**

in any category qualify for Energy Star, that should signal that the technology and economies of scale have reached a point where achieving an Energy Star is too easy and that the bar needs to be raised.

Even in categories that don't have a large number of qualifying products, those models with an Energy Star can have energy costs that vary widely. The Kenmore 7531, a 22-cubic-foot, top-freezer refrigerator, and the Kenmore 7840, a 22-cubic-foot, French-door refrigerator, carry the Energy Star label. But based on our energy-use tests, the top-freezer model could cost about \$50 a year to operate and the French-door refrigerator could cost around \$145 per year. Over the lifetime of the units, that could mean a difference of more than \$1,000. That's because different types of refrigerators have different Energy Star standards. We base our efficiency score on energy used per usable cubic foot of capacity regardless of the type of refrigerator. That makes comparing easier. We have suggested that the Energy Star program also do that.

Bring testing into the 21st century

No Energy Star specifications can make up for test procedures that are outdated or too easy to meet. The EPA and DOE tell consumers that rinsing dishes before putting them in the dishwasher wastes water. So you'd expect their energy test to use dirty dishes. Yet the DOE test requires only a few dirty dishes. In our tests, all of the dishes, glasses, and cutlery are dirty.

Dated procedures also mean that newer features that use energy can go unchecked. "The DOE test procedure for refrigerators cites a rule from 1979," says J.B. Hoyt, di-

rector of government relations at Whirlpool. "A lot has changed since then." The Viking Professional VCSB542 is a built-in refrigerator that used significantly more energy than what's indicated on the model's EnergyGuide label, based on our tougher, more real-world tests. The refrigerator's air-purification system, a new feature that isn't addressed in the current test protocol, was probably the culprit.

As far back as 2006, we've found appliances that perform differently under DOE test conditions than they would in your home. "Appliances started heavily relying on sensors and microprocessors in the last 15 years, generally after the test procedures were written," says Alan Meier, senior scientist in the energy analysis department at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, in Berkeley, Calif. "These digital controls are a very cheap way to reduce energy use. But they can also be used to circumvent older test procedures, making an appliance seem to use less energy in the test procedure than it would in your home," he adds.

The DOE is finally updating a number of its test procedures. That includes building a new testing facility in West Virginia

▶ SIMPLE STEP

FIX LEAKY DUCTS. Pay a qualified heating and cooling pro to seal and insulate heating and cooling ducts that run through your home, especially in unconditioned spaces.

Yearly savings \$400



▶ BY THE NUMBERS

Boosting home energy efficiency

▶ WHAT YOU'RE DOING

81%

bought energy-efficient lightbulbs

44%

purchased an Energy Star appliance

43%

caulked windows and doors

29%

installed energy-efficient windows or doors

24%

installed insulation

23%

upgraded to an energy-efficient heating or cooling system

21%

bought a high-efficiency water heater

3%

installed a renewable energy system, such as solar panels or a wind turbine

▶ WHY YOU'RE DOING IT

77%

to lower energy costs

54%

to reduce environmental impact

36%

to take advantage of a rebate or credit

Source: Consumer Reports National Research Center, June 2010.

where staff will randomly test products as part of the agency's tougher enforcement initiative. "We're harnessing strong technical capabilities so that we don't have to rely on information from industry," says Kathleen Hogan, deputy assistant secretary for energy efficiency at the DOE.

To remain useful, test procedures must keep up with product changes and continually be updated and strengthened. The current process takes too long: usually three years to publish new rules—a period that includes comments from manufacturers and groups such as Consumers Union. It can take another three years for the updated minimum efficiency requirements to take effect. In the meantime, new features and new technologies keep appearing. We think the entire process should take about three years and that legislators should amend statutes, where needed, to speed the process.

Another improvement would be an automatic review of DOE test procedures when more than, say, 10 percent of the products (as measured by sales volume) in any category have requested waivers from the DOE. That many waivers indicates that test procedures are out of date relative to the products in the market.

Take the hassle out of incentives

Improving energy efficiency in homes with products such as insulation and updated heating and cooling equipment can slash energy costs in a typical U.S. home by 20 percent or more, for an annual sav-

□ SIMPLE STEP

STOP PRE-RINSING.

Washing dishes before you put them in the dishwasher wastes up to 6,500 gallons of water per year, plus the cost to heat that water. And our tests show that it's unnecessary.

Yearly savings \$75



ings of about \$450. Multiplied over 128 million residences, that could help the nation save \$57.6 billion in energy costs. The federal government has targeted more than \$11 billion in stimulus funds at making homes and businesses more energy efficient. About \$6 billion more could be on the way if the Home Star program (aka Cash for Caulkers) is signed into law, though that didn't look likely as we went to press.

But much of the money that is available is being left on the table, according to our survey. Only one-quarter of homeowners said they took advantage of a government rebate or tax credit for which they qualified. Complicated and confusing program rules and concern that getting paid was too much of a hassle were among the top reasons. Many wrongly thought their purchases didn't qualify.

None of that surprises Kateri Callahan, president of the Alliance to Save Energy, a nonprofit group based in Washington, D.C., that advocates for energy-efficiency policies. "These programs are good for consumers, but the government needs to do a better job of explaining them," she says.

Then there's the matter of money. Almost a quarter of our poll respondents who qualified for a program and didn't apply for it said the incentives were too small. That was especially true in the case of the cash-for-appliances state rebate program. At \$300 million, it's a pittance compared with the \$3 billion cash-for-clunkers car program. States offering more generous appliance rebates have had more success.

Adopt what works abroad

Smaller homes and appliances and fewer air conditioners and clothes dryers account for a significant part of the lower home energy use in the European Union.

But the EU has also taken a progressive stand against standby power, the amount of energy a product consumes when it's not in use, setting a 1-watt maximum for appliances without a display, moving to 0.5 watts in 2013. In the U.S., Energy Star has developed standby power limits for some electronics but not for most appliances. "There are now at least 40 products in a typical home that are continuously drawing power," explains Meier, the Berkeley Lab scientist. "As a result, we're seeing new homes where the standby power exceeds 100 watts before anyone moves in."

To make sure their standards better reflect real-world energy use, Australia has started field testing appliances in use.

The EU energy guide label also includes performance ratings for some products, based on standards developed by the International Electrotechnical Commission. Case in point: EU consumers shopping for a new washer can compare cleaning power as well as efficiency. That's important because higher efficiency can start to affect performance. For example, companies

□ SIMPLE STEP

ADJUST MODES. Manufacturers often ship televisions in "retail mode" to ensure the best picture quality under bright showroom lights. But the more efficient "home mode" is fine for most types of viewing.

Yearly savings \$30 to \$60



□ SIMPLE STEP

TAME HIDDEN ENERGY USE.

Between 5 and 10 percent of residential electricity goes to devices that draw power when they're off or in standby mode. Video games are a major offender. Turn them off when you pry the controls out of your kid's hands.

Yearly savings \$125



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES

Take advantage of tax credits and rebates

Whether you're putting in a \$50,000 solar panel system or adding \$50 worth of insulation, chances are the government will help foot the bill. Below we detail the different givebacks. Don't see what you're looking for? Check with your utility company; many have added items such as showerheads, toilets, and thermostats to their rebate programs. Manufacturers and retailers are another source of incentives, especially for energy-efficient appliances.

▣ Federal Energy Tax Credits

What is it? A 30 percent tax credit up to \$1,500 on duct sealing, heating and cooling equipment, insulation, roofing, windows, and other energy-efficiency improvements. Installation costs are not included for sealing air leaks, adding insulation, or putting in windows, doors, and roofs. Credits are currently limited by the Alternative Minimum Tax (but weren't in 2009) and may not be combined with other federal rebates.

Deadline. The project must be completed by Dec. 31, 2010.

How to collect. File IRS form 5695 with your 2010 taxes. Keep a copy of the Manufacturer's Certification Statement and all receipts and itemized bills. If you completed your project in 2009 and didn't claim the credit, you can file an amended return for 2009.

For more information. Go to www.energystar.gov

(search under Tax Credits for Energy Efficiency) or www.ConsumerReports.org/energytaxcredits.

▣ Federal Renewable Energy Tax Credits

What is it? A 30 percent tax credit on solar energy systems, geothermal heat pumps, and small wind turbines. Primary residences and second homes qualify. There is no cap on how much you can claim.

Deadline. The project must be completed by Dec. 31, 2016.

How to collect. File IRS form 5695 with your taxes for the year in which the work is completed. Credits are not limited by the AMT. Keep a copy of the Manufacturer's Certification Statement and all receipts and itemized bills. If you completed your project in 2009 and didn't claim the credit, you can file an amended return for 2009.

For more information. Go to www.energystar.gov and search under Tax Credits for Energy Efficiency.

▣ Cash for Appliances

What is it? The Department of Energy had each state design its own program for its portion of the \$300 million program. Rebates usually range from \$50 to \$500 and might cover dishwashers, freezers, furnaces and boilers, heat pumps (air source and geothermal), refrigerators, room air

conditioners, washers, and water heaters.

How to collect. Most states have mail-in forms, though a handful offer point-of-purchase rebates.

Deadline. States have until February 2012 to spend the money. As of press time, rebates were available in more than half of all states.

For more information. Go to www.energysavers.gov or www.ConsumerReports.org/clunkers.

▣ Home Star

What is it? Under proposed legislation, "Silver Star" rebates would cover 50 percent of the total costs up to \$3,000 of various energy-efficiency projects, including adding insulation, sealing ducts, sealing and upgrading windows, roofing, and heating and cooling equipment. "Gold Star" rebates would award \$3,000 to homeowners who pay for a full energy audit and follow through on its recommendations to boost the overall energy efficiency of their home by at least 20 percent. Additional rebates are pending.

Deadline. At press time, the Home Star legislation had not been signed into law.

How to collect. Consumers would get the rebate from professionals, who would then apply for reimbursement.

For more information. Go to www.encyfirst.org.

could make washers that use very little water, but you might need to run the machine several times to get clothes clean, which would negate any energy savings. For now, if you want efficiency and performance ratings for many products, check our Ratings.

Turn up the heat on industry

Efficiency has become a big selling point for manufacturers. But that doesn't mean they're eager to increase efficiency requirements. "Industry exaggerates how hard it will be to make their products more efficient in terms of cost or other constraints," says Noah Horowitz, senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Flat-screen TVs, for example. Industry repeatedly said the efficiency level was too hard to reach, yet a few months later at the Consumer Electronics Show, several major manufacturers had big signs saying that all their TVs would meet the new requirements."

The Consumer Electronics Association objects to that depiction. "Nobody questions the importance of energy efficiency," says Douglas Johnson, the association's vice president of technology policy. But his group opposed mandatory TV efficiency standards, which California adopted and the DOE is currently considering.

Stiffer fines must be levied against manufacturers that don't play by the energy-efficiency rules. And when a violation occurs, it's important that it be widely publicized so that consumers are informed. That kind of accountability needs to be applied across all U.S. energy policy.

▣ SIMPLE STEP

WASH IN COLD WATER. Think that won't get your clothes clean? Think again. Tide 2X Ultra for Cold Water for traditional washers, which we tested using cold water, ranked best overall at removing grass, wine, and other tough stains in our tests. **Yearly savings \$60**





SHINING ON Project leader John Banta checks on the life span of compact fluorescent bulbs in our testing lab.

Lightbulbs

We find 11 top picks and take a look at LEDs

WHAT IF the lightbulb you put in your baby's nursery didn't have to be replaced until Junior is off to college? That's the promise of the latest generation of light-emitting diodes (LEDs), coming soon to a store near you. Those bulbs claim to rival the look, dimming ability, and light quality of incandescents; contain no mercury (as compact fluorescent lightbulbs do); and last up to five times longer than CFLs and 50 times longer than incandescents.

LEDs are not without their concerns. For starters, they can cost \$60 or more apiece. But even at that price, an LED bulb would save you about \$300 in electrical cost over its life compared with an incandescent. Early versions of LEDs had problems with color, brightness, and light dispersal, and cost up to \$100. We were able to buy pre-retail samples of one of the newest, the Cree CR6, a replacement for a 65-watt recessed downlight, from the manufacturer (see First Look, on facing page). As that LED and others arrive in stores, we'll buy

them, test them, and report back.

In the meantime, you don't have to sit in the dark. Our tests found that there's no shortage of inexpensive, money-saving, energy-efficient CFLs. Most delivered on brightness and many provided color that was closer to incandescents' than earlier versions. And all of the tested bulbs had significantly less than 5 milligrams of mercury, the cap that Energy Star sets for those bulbs. Still, CFLs should be recycled.

Here's what else we learned:

CFLs keep burning brightly. The bulbs in our labs have been cycling on and off since early 2009, or 6,000 hours. For comparison, a typical incandescent bulb lasts only around 1,000 hours. Even after all that time, brightness and warm-up times remained virtually the same as after 3,000 hours of testing. Our results were confirmed by an outside lab.

Dimming gets easier, not better. Standard dimmers don't always work well with dimmable CFLs. We tested two models designed to be used with dimmable CFLs:

the Leviton Decora 6673 and Apollo Analog 80005, each \$20. The Apollo claims to let you dim a dimmable CFL as low as an incandescent bulb. But neither dimmer was any better than a standard dimmer at reaching low light levels. We also confirmed those results with an outside lab.

An area where both products shined was in dimming a light fixture with multiple bulbs or dimming rooms where multiple lights are controlled by one switch. With a regular dimmer, as you dim the CFLs some will flicker or go out sooner than others, forcing you to increase the power until they all go on and then you have to start dimming again. The new dimmers make all of the bulbs dim in unison. But the Decora was a bit more convenient because when it's turned on again, it automatically returns to the level at which it was last set. The dimmers were as easy to install as regular dimmers and performed better when identical bulbs were used in multibulb fixtures.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Ikea Sparsam Energy Savings porch bulb was the lowest-scoring CFL in our tests. Five of the 10 bulbs we tested failed before 3,000 hours.

Energy Star responds to criticism.

About 90 percent of CFLs qualify for Energy Star, something even the Department of Energy's internal audit cited as a problem because consumers cannot easily distinguish between the relative efficiencies of various CFLs. The Environmental Protection Agency, which oversees CFLs, plans to develop new Energy Star specifications that will go into effect in spring 2012.

How to choose

If you're buying CFLs or considering LEDs, look for rebates from retailers and utilities and at www.energystar.gov and www.dsireusa.org/incentives. And save your receipts in case there's a problem. Also keep in mind:

Think about the fixture. CFLs last longer and perform better if they're on for 15 minutes or more. That longevity makes them good for hard-to-reach fixtures. But they take time to reach full brightness, from about 30 seconds for spirals to roughly

2 minutes for recessed bulbs and 3 minutes for outdoor bulbs, so don't use them in staircases or other areas where you need instant brightness. If you don't like the swirly look of CFLs, use a covered version. But those aren't as bright, which could be a problem if your light fixture's shades are dark, frosted, or textured. Because CFLs contain a small amount of mercury, don't put them in lamps that children could tip over and cause the bulb to break. If a CFL shatters, don't panic; just follow the clean-up tips at www.ConsumerReports.org/broken_cfl.

Twelve-watt LEDs are designed for many applications, including table lamps and ceiling- and wall-mounted fixtures, much like the 60-watt incandescents and 16-watt CFLs they're replacing. LED bulbs are even cooler to the touch than CFLs.

Note the lumens. Lumens indicate how much light the bulb provides. Buying a bulb with just the right brightness and the fewest watts saves energy and money.

Energy Star suggests that a 60-watt incandescent and its CFL or LED replacements have at least 800 lumens. Our tests found that some CFLs are slightly dimmer than comparable incandescent bulbs and continue to dim as they are used.

Consider the kelvins. The color of the light is measured by its temperature in kelvins (K). To match a soft-white incandescent, get a CFL or LED with 2700 K. The light from bulbs with 3000 K is comparable to the whiter light of halogen bulbs, while bulbs with 3500 K to 4100 K give off a cool, bright white light. To mimic daylight, choose bulbs with 5000 K to 6500 K.

The Color Rendering Index (CRI) ranges from 0 to 100 and indicates how accurately colors appear under the light. The higher the CRI, the better. Incandescent bulbs are near 100. Most CFLs we tested have a CRI in the low 80s. We haven't verified the CRI of LEDs yet, but manufacturers say they will be between 80 and 90.

FIRST LOOK

Cree CR6 light-emitting diode (LED) bulb

The Cree CR6 was designed to replace a 65-watt incandescent recessed bulb, and it claims to provide warm, beautiful light without sacrificing energy efficiency or dimming ability. In our initial take, based on a pre-retail sample, the Cree seems more promising than some of the other LED bulbs we've seen.

It brightened instantly when we turned it on, like an incandescent does. It also seems to dim almost as well as an incandescent and better than even the best dimmable CFLs we've tested. And its light color seems truer. At 10.5 watts, the CR6 used 84 percent less energy than a

comparable incandescent and 30 percent less than a comparable CFL. But at 575 claimed lumens, this LED isn't quite as bright as comparable CFLs we tested, which provided about 625 lumens after 3,000 hours of testing. We'll buy retail samples of the CR6, put them through our full battery of tests, and report back.

Get ready for the price: \$50 to \$60, Cree estimates, giving new meaning to investing in the future.



LIGHT YEARS The Cree CR6 (top right) hides the individual diodes, visible on earlier LED bulbs shown here. Many diodes on one LED (far right) have already gone out, despite limited use.

CLOSE UP

New label makes comparing bulbs easier

Say goodbye to watts and hello to lumens. Compact fluorescent and LED bulbs use fewer watts, or less energy, to produce the same amount of light, or lumens, as incandescent bulbs. But the color of the light varies by the type of bulb, so you need more information than just a bulb's watts to get the light you'd like.

The Lighting Facts label, patterned on nutrition labels on foods, will give you much of that information. It lists the bulb's lumens, or brightness; its estimated yearly energy cost; how long the bulb is expected to last; its appearance, from warm to cool; how much energy, or watts, it uses; and whether the bulb contains mercury. The label must be on packages starting in mid-2011, but you might see it sooner.

Lighting Facts		Per Bulb
Brightness	870 lumen	
Estimated Yearly Energy Cost	\$1	
<small>Based on 3 hrs/day, 11¢/kWh Cost depends on rates and use</small>		
Life	5.5 year	
<small>Based on 3 hrs/day</small>		
Light Appearance	Warm ————— Cool 2700 K	
Energy Used	13 watt	
Contains Mercury		
<small>For more on clean up and safe disposal, visit epa.gov/cfl.</small>		



A1 EcoSmart



D1 GE

Overview

Compact fluorescent lightbulbs will quickly pay for themselves, saving about \$6 per bulb per year over electricity costs for incandescents. Energy Star-qualified bulbs usually performed better in our tests.

Recommended

These are high-scoring models that stand out for the reasons below.

Best for lamps or ceiling fixtures:

- A1 EcoSmart \$6
- A3 Philips \$8
- A4 Feit \$8
- D3 EcoSmart \$8

All replace a 60-watt incandescent bulb and can be used in sconces. **A1** and **A3** are better choices for light fixtures that are frequently turned on and off. If you prefer the look of a covered bulb, use **D3**. But it takes longer to reach full brightness.

Best for recessed downlights or track lights:

- B1 EcoSmart \$13
- B2 EcoSmart \$10
- B3 GE \$10

Choose one of these depending on the wattage you're replacing. All provide excellent brightness but take some time to warm up, as do all CFLs of this type. Stick with **B1** or **B3** if the fixture is frequently turned on and off.

Best for outdoor lights:

- C1 Philips \$7
- C2 GE \$7
- D1 GE \$8
- D2 Philips \$8
- D3 EcoSmart \$8

All take time to reach full brightness, and the colder the weather, the longer the warm-up time—up to 3 minutes. But that's usual for this type of CFL. Consider **D2** and **D3** for porch or post lights, but neither is as bright as an outdoor flood CFL.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score combines life and rapid-cycle testing, brightness at 3,000 hours of use, and warm-up time performance. **Life testing** reflects how many 3-hour on and 20-minute off cycles a bulb survives after 3,000 hours of the "on" cycle. **Rapid-cycle testing** reflects the average number of 5-minute on and 5-minute off cycles each bulb survived. **Brightness** indicates the brightness (lumens) of each bulb after 3,000 hours of life testing, as compared with the brightness of a comparable incandescent. **Warm-up time** is how long the bulb took to reach

Ratings CFLs

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A, B, etc.)

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price per pack	Bulbs per pack	Overall score	Test results							
						Claimed equivalent wattage	Claimed life (hr.)	Life testing	Rapid-cycle testing	Brightness	Warm-up time	Actual 3,000-hour brightness (lumens)	Actual color temperature (kelvin)
A SPIRAL Usually used in table and floor lamps and ceiling fixtures. All have a CRI* between 81 and 83.													
✓	1	EcoSmart (Home Depot) 14W=60 Watt 423-599 EDXO-14	\$ 6	4	85	60	10,000	●	●	●	●	800	2730
	2	GE Energy Smart 13W=60W FLE13HT3/3/SW RoHS Compliant 97689	8	3	81	60	10,000	●	●	●	○	755	2690
✓	3	Philips Energy Saver 60W Soft White Mini Twister 13W=60W 15495	8	4	79	60	10,000	●	●	●	●	770	2690
✓	4	Feit EcoBulb Plus 60W Replacement ESL13T/3/ECO	8	3	69	60	10,000	●	○	●	○	855	2715
	5	GE Energy Smart Instant-On Mini 72466	5	1	68	60	6,000	●	●	●	○	775	2745
	6	Satco Energy Saving Mini Spiral Soft White S6235	7	4	68	60	10,000	●	○	●	○	745	2800
	7	Great Value (Walmart) Soft White 60W CFL13 RoHS EDXO 13/14	9	6	67	60	10,000	●	●	●	●	840	2720
	8	Sylvania Super Saver Soft White Mini 60 watt CF13EL	9	3	66	60	10,000	●	○	●	○	765	2690
B INDOOR FLOOD/REFLECTOR Commonly used in recessed or track lights. All have a CRI* between 81 and 83.													
✓	1	EcoSmart (Home Depot) BR40 Soft White EDXR 40-23 780-758 05623	13	2	76	120	8,000	●	●	●	●	945	2655
✓	2	EcoSmart (Home Depot) BR30 65 Watt Soft White Indoor Reflector Flood 2R3014	10	2	71	65	8,000	●	○	●	●	625	2670
✓	3	GE Energy Smart Floodlight 90W R40 47479 FLE/26	10	2	71	90	10,000	●	●	●	●	1180	2715
	4	Philips Energy Saver 65W EL/AR30	11	2	70	65	8,000	●	○	●	●	620	2680
	5	Philips Energy Saver 85 Reflector Flood R40 23W=85W EL/A R40	7	1	65	85	8,000	●	●	○	●	970	2665
C OUTDOOR FLOOD/REFLECTOR Mostly used in accent or security lights. All have a CRI* between 81 and 85.													
✓	1	Philips Energy Saver EL/A PAR38 23W 15285	7	1	79	75	8,000	●	NA	●	●	1150	2705
✓	2	GE Energy Smart Soft White Floodlight FLE26/2/PAR38/ XL 47483	7	1	77	90	10,000	●	NA	●	●	1205	2715
	3	Sylvania 75 Watt Indoor Flood Soft White CF23EL/BR40/BL1	9	1	70	75	8,000	●	NA	●	●	1075	2860
	4	EcoSmart (Home Depot) Soft White PAR 38 EDXP38-23 159-979	13	2	64	90	8,000	●	NA	●	●	1120	2695
D PORCH/POST COVERED Usually used in outdoor fixtures. All have a CRI* between 77 and 83.													
✓	1	GE Energy Smart Postlight 40W FLE11/2TC14/SW 49894	8	1	73	40	6,000	●	NA	●	●	445	2690
✓	2	Philips Energy Saver 60 Outdoor Postlight Soft White 14WEL/O	8	1	70	60	8,000	●	NA	●	●	715	2695
✓	3	EcoSmart (Home Depot) A19-Lamp 60 Watt Soft White 967-034 11314	8	2	70	60	8,000	●	NA	○	○	700	2690
	4	Ikea Sparsam Energy Saving Bulb E26 GSU111 50060609	6	2	22	50	10,000	●	NA	○	●	440	2660

*Color Rendering Index. □ Not Energy Star-qualified.

near full brightness. **Actual brightness (lumens)** is the average measured brightness of 10 bulb samples after being life tested. **Actual color temperature (kelvin)** is the average measured color temperature of 10 bulb samples. Those with 2700 K are closest to incandescent bulbs; ones with 3000 K are similar to halogen bulbs. **Claimed equivalent wattage** is the equivalent incandescent bulb that a manufacturer says the CFL will replace. **Claimed life** is how long the manufacturer says the bulb will last. **Price** is approximate retail.

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GAUGING SAVINGS Testers prepare to put hybrid heaters from Rheem and GE through their paces.

Water heaters

Cutting your hot-water bill just got easier

AS RECENTLY AS last year, replacing a broken water heater meant paying a few hundred dollars for a relatively inefficient storage-tank unit or spending thousands to eke out energy savings with a solar or tankless system. But smarter new heaters are changing that.

Three we tested saved enough energy to pay for their roughly \$2,000 cost in about five to seven years rather than decades. Known as hybrids, they have a conventional electric storage heater paired with a heat pump that extracts heat from the air and uses it to help heat the water. Models from GE, Rheem, and A.O. Smith used almost 60 percent less energy than standard electric heaters, which account for roughly half of all water heaters sold. That's a \$325 savings per year, based on national average costs for electricity.

Those savings grow when you factor in the array of incentives. You can still get a 30 percent federal tax credit on a hybrid

we tested if you install it by the end of the year, when the credit runs out. Add in any state and local rebates, and a hybrid heater could pay for its purchase price and its \$300 to \$400 installation in even less time, compared with the 10 years or more that's typical for the solar heaters we tested.

Our tests through winter snow and

DID YOU KNOW?

\$15

That's how much you can save (hey, it's a movie ticket and popcorn) on your annual water-heating bills by lowering the heater's temperature from 130°F to 120° F and insulating hot-water pipes, based on average costs.



EFFICIENCY BOOST Digital controls like GE's let you use only the heat pump while you're away or only electricity for faster heating.

summer heat also show that what you save with solar and tankless systems can vary significantly based on which one you buy and where you live. We also tested an add-on heat pump that costs far more than its low price suggests. (See "Some Savings but High Maintenance," on the facing page.)

Hybrids: Savings, even in winter. We tested the A.O. Smith PHPT-80, GE GEH50DNSRSA, and Rheem HP50RH in a 65° F test chamber to simulate a cool, Northeast basement—a tougher environment than the Sun Belt because there's less heat to extract. The A.O. Smith led with average savings of 59 percent, though the others came close. Before we could complete testing of a fourth model, the Stiebel Eltron Accelera 300, its heat pump stopped working; we've had it repaired and are putting it through our tests. But at more than \$3,000 installed, it will have to save even more than the others to match their payback times.

Solar: Great in fair weather. Solar heaters supplement an electric heater by transferring the sun's heat via liquid that flows through a roof-mounted collector. None saved more than 32 percent over standard electric heaters in last year's tests. The Eagle Sun and Heliodyne we added this year qualify for Energy Star status. They also delivered stellar savings in sunny summer months: 82 percent for the Eagle Sun and 79 percent for the Heliodyne. But those savings plummeted to 28 and 35 percent, respectively, in winter. Another model, Sungrabber, could pay for itself as quickly as a hybrid heater, but like other solar systems, it's more complex.

Tankless: Expect a long wait. Instead of storing hot water, tankless heaters fire up a burner and run water through a heat exchanger to supply it when needed. Makers of gas-fired models claim they produce endless hot water and savings as high as

50 percent over gas storage-tank heaters. But in past tests they saved only \$70 to \$80 per year. Up-front costs of \$2,000 to \$2,400 with installation could push the payback time to 15 to 22 years—longer than most might last. And even if you install a gas unit before the federal tax credit expires, payback would still take eight to 12 years.

How to choose

You can also save with the right conventional water heater. Models we cut open in past tests confirmed that electric heaters with nine- to 12-year warranties usually have larger heating elements, thicker insulation, and beefier corrosion-fighting anodes. Got a gas or oil heater? Gas is relatively inexpensive, but replacing a broken oil water heater with a hybrid electric could save \$325 in annual costs, about the same as if you replaced an all-electric heater. Here's what else to consider:

Check for rebates. The federal tax credit for hybrid heaters and nonelectric tankless systems will soon run out, but the one for solar heaters lasts through 2016. You'll also find state and local rebates for Energy Star storage-tank models. Go to www.dsireusa.org for a state-by-state list.

For hybrids, check your space. Hybrids tend to be taller than conventional heaters, since the heat pump is usually on top. Models we tested need as much as 7 feet

from floor to ceiling and up to 1,000 cubic feet of uncooled space to capture enough heat from the air. You'll also need a condensate pump (about \$150) if there's no drain nearby. And remember that hybrid heaters are noisier, exhaust cool air, and can rob some heated air in winter.

For solar, look for Energy Star. Certification from the Solar Rating and Certifi-

cation Corp., an industry group, is all you need for the federal tax credit and many state and local rebates. But Energy Star models also qualify and should pay off sooner.

For tankless, factor in winter. Cooler ground-water temperatures reduce a tankless heater's output. Have a pro use your lowest ground-water temperature to calculate how much capacity you'll need.

CLOSE UP

Some savings but high maintenance

AirTap, from AirGenerate, is essentially a \$700 heat pump you add onto a storage-tank water heater. That relatively low price and its compatibility with electric and gas heaters make it a tempting upgrade. But turning your existing heater into a hybrid could cost more than you bargained for.

The AirTap saves 28 percent in energy over a conventional electric heater, which was roughly half of what we saved with the ready-to-install hybrid systems we tested. Then there's the upkeep: Recommended maintenance includes replacing the heater's corrosion-fighting anode at least twice a year, which costs about \$300 per year with installation. That would more than outweigh the savings the AirTap provided.



Bottom line. AirGenerate is introducing an integrated hybrid water heater of its own. Meanwhile, you'll probably spend less and save more with one of the hybrid heaters we tested. Also consider an Energy Star-qualified gas heater if yours needs replacing.

Hybrid vs. solar

While some solar heaters save almost as much as hybrid electrics, most take far longer to pay for themselves.

Brand & model	Installed cost (est.)	Tank size (gal.)	Annual savings (avg.)	Payback with federal credit (yr.)	Warranty (yr.)
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HYBRID ELECTRIC HEATERS All are Energy Star-qualified and eligible through 2010 for federal tax credit of up to 30 percent.

A.O. Smith PHPT-80 ¹	\$2,250	80	59%	5	10
Rheem HP50RH ¹	1,750	50	58	4	10
GE GEH50DNSRSA ¹	1,950	50	56	4.5	10

Brand & model	Installed cost (est.)	Collector type	Annual savings (avg.)	Payback with federal credit (yr.)	Warranty (yr.)
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SOLAR HEATERS All are certified by the Solar Rating and Certification Corp., needed for many rebates and credits.

Eagle Sun DX-80-64 ¹	\$7,500-8,500	2 flat panels	55%	12-14	10 for panel; 6 for tank
Heliodyne 50190 ¹	6,000-7,000	2 flat panels	49	10-12	10 for panel; 6 for tank
Sungrabber 200 Series	2,500-4,500 ³	2 tube-filled mats	35	5-9	10 ⁴
SunMaxx 3570 ²	5,500-7,000	1 glass-tube bank	19	23-33	10

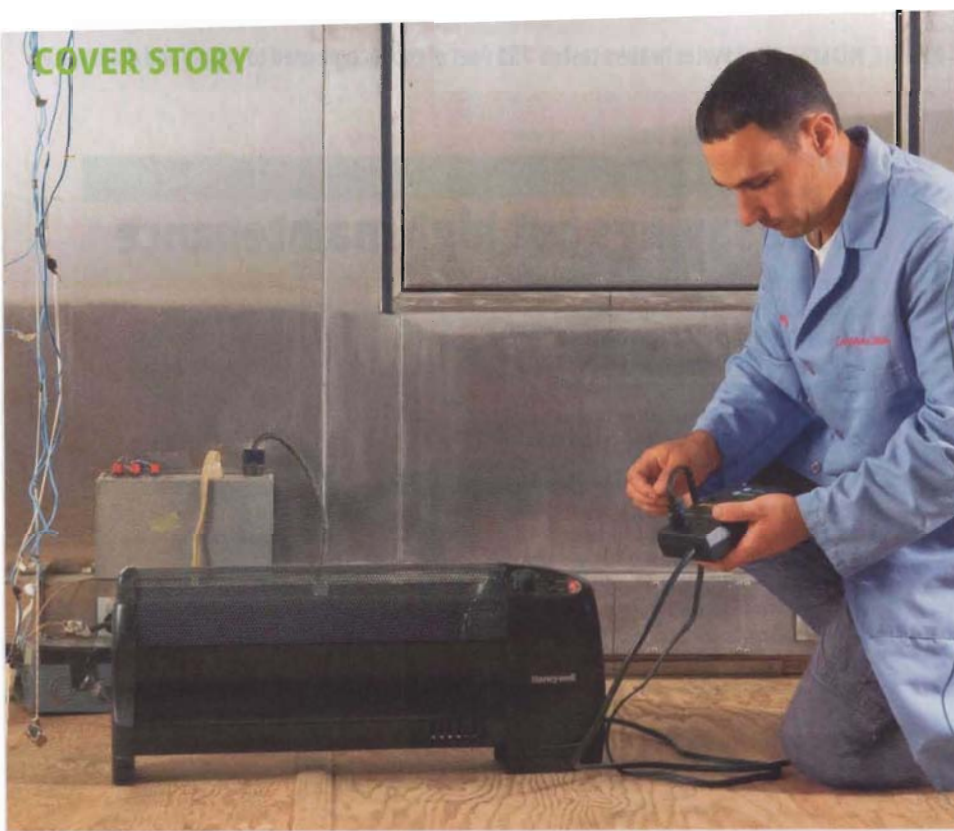
¹ Energy Star-qualified. ² Manufacturer has updated system. ³ Lower price is for do-it-yourself installation. ⁴ 3 years for DIY installation.

Our results for hybrid electric water heaters reflect tests conducted in a 65° F temperature-controlled chamber and, for solar heaters, year-round tests outside our Yonkers, N.Y., headquarters. The figures above are based on the

consumption of hot water by two to four people (80 to 85 gallons per day) compared with all-electric storage-tank heaters. How much you save in your home might differ based on climate and usage.



A.O. Smith



TEMPERATURE TEST Project leader Joe Pacella checks how the top-rated Honeywell sticks to its setting.

Space heaters

Five top our list for quick comfort on the cheap

PRACTICALLY ANY HEATER can help make a chilly room more inviting. Our latest tests show that the best do that more consistently, conveniently, and safely than ever for as little as \$60—not the hundreds you can spend on a fancy infomercial model.

We focused on electric heaters, the best-selling type by far. Most models include thermostats to help them maintain the temperature you set. All the heaters in this test have a sensor that shuts them off if they overheat; in our tests three years ago most of them had one. You'll also find more models with tip-over switches, hot-surface alerts, digital displays, timers, and remote controls. Some, such as the wall-mountable Kenwood, \$80, bring a dash of style to cold-weather comfort.

But even manufacturers admit that space heaters won't trim your utility bills on their own. The website for the \$550 Heat Surge (also known as the Amish electric fireplace) advises turning down the heat, usually in other rooms, to save, after

pressure from the Better Business Bureau to clarify its energy-cutting claims. That's because the 1,500 watts needed to fully power most heaters cost an average 17 cents per hour nationwide compared with 13 cents for oil and 6 cents for natural gas for the equivalent amount of energy. Kerosene and propane heaters can cost less to run, but they pose added safety risks.

Months of tests in a climate-controlled chamber show that even some portable heaters with thermostats can give you the chills in the room you're heating, and some still lack important safety features.

Some heaters scrimp. Two models, from Honeywell and Lasko, allowed wide temperature swings. The Heat Surge doesn't have a thermostat. That model and the \$300 EdenPure also lack the temperature display and timer that you'd expect for the price, along with a hot-surface alert and a tip-over switch, which turns the heater off if it's knocked over. Overheat protection is the primary safety feature, but the others add a layer of protection.

Faster heating brings added noise.

Convection heaters without a fan were as silent as some ads promise. Fan-equipped models distribute heat more quickly with some noise. The quietest were in the low-40-decibel range, about as loud as a refrigerator; the loudest, at more than 50 decibels, were about as noisy as moderate rain. But that's still far less raucous than the 80-plus decibels some vacuums emit.

Radiant heaters didn't shine. Those heaters tend to warm one or two people fastest because they use an electric-ribbon element or quartz tube to quickly heat what's in front of them. But the \$35 SoleusAir we tested had no thermostat for optimal temperature control, and the Lakewood was missing a number of safety features included in other models.

How to choose

Space heaters are essentially a Band-Aid for underlying heating problems. Adding insulation to attics, basements, crawl spaces, ceilings, and floors can help keep warm air in and cold air out. Also be sure to caulk around the points where electrical and plumbing lines pass through the house. Then keep these tips in mind:

Match the type to your needs. Convection models are best for heating an entire room because they heat the air within it. Manufacturers suggest roughly 10 watts of power for every square foot, though less power should be enough to supplementally heat most spaces. Radiant heaters deliver quick spot heating, but their heat dissipates quickly when they're turned off.

Check the weight. At 9 to 11 pounds, all of our top picks are relatively easy to lift and move. But several other models weigh upward of 20 pounds. The Heat Surge weighs a whopping 58 pounds, thanks in part to its fake-flame display and Amish-built wood mantle, though it has wheels; a \$249 version comes without the mantle.

DID YOU KNOW?

\$191

That's how much you can slice off your annual home heating bills by insulating attics, basements, and other key areas, based on average heating costs.

Try lifting and carrying any space heater before buying it.

Save fueled models for emergencies. Propane and kerosene heaters create the most heat. But because of their open flames, higher surface temperatures, and the carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide they release, we recommend that you not use them indoors except during a power outage. Ask your building department about any restrictions before you buy one. Regularly clean and inspect the heater, never move it while using it, and put it in the center of a well-vented room with battery-powered CO and smoke alarms.

Overview

All of our recommended models scored at least Very Good for temperature control, safety, noise, and ease of use—something neither of the radiant models managed. All models have overheat protection; our top picks also have a tip-over switch and were easy to control and carry. Most also cost less than \$100, not \$300 or more.

CR Best Buy
These offer the best combination of performance and value; all are recommended.

Recommended
These are high-scoring models that stand out for the reasons below.

Best choices for less than \$100:

- A1 Honeywell** \$70 **CR Best Buy**
- A2 Kenwood** \$80
- A3 SoleusAir** \$80
- A4 Honeywell** \$60 **CR Best Buy**

All use natural convection to heat a room, making them quieter but slower-heating than fan-equipped models. **A1** and **A4** have a room-temperature display and hot-grill alert; the sleekly styled **A2** is wall-mountable. **A3** includes a remote control and, like **A4**, a timer to automatically limit heating time.

Faster heating at a higher price:

- B1 Vornado** \$150

It's not exactly cheap, but the Vornado offers the best combination of performance and features in this category. It's also relatively light and quiet for a fan-equipped heater and was best at temperature control.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is weighted average of temperature control, safety, noise, and ease of use. Displayed scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. **Temperature control** is ability to maintain set temperature in our test room; top-scoring models had variations of fewer than 3° F; poorest performers varied by more than 6°. **Safety** includes contact-surface temperatures, safety

controls, likelihood of fire hazard, cord length (longer cords might reduce safety risks by eliminating the need for an extension cord). **Noise** is peak levels during typical operation. **Ease of use** includes size, weight, and ease of using controls and handles. Note that all tested models have overheat protection, which shuts off the heater automatically if it becomes too hot. **Price** is approximate retail.

CLOSE UP

Make space heaters less risky

Portable space heaters cause an estimated 21,650 home fires and 1,512 fire-related injuries and deaths each year.

- Look for a safety-certification label from an independent testing organization, such as the UL mark from Underwriters Laboratories, the ETL label from Intertek, or certification from CSA International.
- Check the power cord for cracks, fraying, loose connections, and broken plugs; repair

or replace the heater if you find any damage. Most manufacturers recommend against using extension cords.

- Keep children, pets, and flammable items at least 3 feet from the heater.
- Don't use heaters on uneven surfaces, near foot traffic, or in children's rooms.
- Never leave a heater on unattended or while you're sleeping.



A1 Honeywell



A4 Honeywell



B1 Vornado

Ratings Space heaters

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A, B, etc.)

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Specs		Overall score	Test results			Features		
				Weight (lb.)	Cord (in.)		Temperature control	Safety	Noise	Ease of use	Temperature display	Tip-over switch
A NATURAL CONVECTION These non-fan models heat whole rooms quietly but slowly.												
✓	1	Honeywell HZ-817	\$ 70	9	73	86	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	2	Kenwood Mica Panel HHP1500K	80	11	75	85	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	SoleusAir HM2-15R-32	80	11	74	84	●	●	●	●	●	●
✓	4	Honeywell Low Profile Convection Heater HZ-519	60	10	72	82	●	●	●	●	●	●
	5	DeLonghi ComforTemp MG7307CM	50	24	86	74	●	●	●	○	●	●
	6	DeLonghi SafeHeat TRD0715T	60	26	76	71	●	○	●	○	●	●
B FAN-FORCED CONVECTION These are the fastest, and noisiest, way to heat rooms.												
✓	1	Vornado Vortex Heat Touch-Stone 500 EH1-0032-28	150	8	72	78	●	●	●	●	●	●
	2	Honeywell HZ-385BP	75	7	79	68	●	●	●	●	●	●
	3	EdenPure GEN3	300	27	101	65	●	●	●	○	●	●
	4	Lasko Ceramic Tower 5572	70	11	74	58	○	○	●	●	●	●
	5	Heat Surge ADL-2000M-X	550	58	73	42	●	○	●	●	●	●
C RADIANT These are best for quick spot-heating, though none are top performers.												
	1	SoleusAir MS-09	35	5	70	56	●	●	●	●	●	●
	2	Lakewood 205	30	6	70	55	●	●	○	○	●	●

☐ Lacks thermostat. ☒ Company is no longer in business, but model is still in stores.



Save on car insurance

How to find the right policy that will pay when you need it most

THOSE QUIRKY CHARACTERS in auto-insurance TV ads might give you more laughs than actual savings, according to a 2009 survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. Only 14 percent of 4,500 ConsumerReports.org subscribers who compared premiums found that they would save money by switching insurers.

That doesn't mean shopping is a waste of time. But it's only one way to save on auto premiums, which these days are buffeted by a slew of variables, such as:

Rising costs. Auto-insurance premiums are up 10 percent since 2008, compared with zero for overall inflation. That's a big change from the three prior years, when rates rose 1 percent per year on average.

Credit-based insurance scores. Hard times have hurt many consumers' credit

scores. That could result in rate increases, thanks to most carriers' use of credit-based insurance scores in setting premiums. Consumer advocates (including Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of CONSUMER REPORTS) have long argued that credit-based scoring is unfair because scores are not related to accident risk. But legislative efforts in 27 states to ban or restrict the practice over the past two years have been unsuccessful.

Uninsured motorists. The recession has prompted unemployed consumers to go without insurance, which could shift some or all of their liability costs to you.

Data mining. Some insurers use consulting firms that mine databases for personal policyholder information that may or may not be accurate. One company claims to dig for information about your kids, your

marital status, your job, and other data to confront you with for a possible rate hike.

Corner-cutting repairs. Some insurers push policyholders to get their cars fixed at specified repair shops, which left our readers less satisfied, so that the companies can cut costs, often through use of cheaper aftermarket replacement parts.

Some cost factors are beyond your control, but there's still plenty you can do to cut your premiums for the auto coverage you need. Here are 11 ways to save:

▶ Do an annual rate check

Check rates from other insurers annually to make sure you're getting the best deal. But if you've been with the same insurer a long time, it might be tough to beat its rates. That's one reason shopping around didn't pay off for our survey respondents: More

than 60 percent have been with the same carrier for 10 or more years. "Insurers reward longevity, particularly loss-free longevity," says Bill Wilson, associate vice president for education and research at the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America. Long-term policyholders get bumped up into better rate tiers.

But most consumers, 75 percent, haven't shopped for auto insurance in the past year, and of those who did, most researched only one or two companies, according to a recent insurance-industry survey. By looking father afield, you'll have a better shot at savings.

For example, a San Diego multicar couple in their 40s with a 17-year-old male driver on their policy and no violations or accidents might jump at Progressive's \$6,104 annual premium if they were already paying \$8,593 to Farmers Mid-Century. But they'd find even lower rates at State Farm (\$4,625), Safeco (\$3,717), Geico (\$3,648), and USAA (\$2,883), according to rate comparisons published by the California Department of Insurance.

Check whether your state insurance department provides rate comparisons; go to www.naic.org/state_web_map.htm to find a link to your state's agency. You can also compare multiple insurers online at Answer Financial, Insure.com, InsWeb, and NetQuote. You usually won't get an immediate quote online, but you will get e-mail messages from hungry agents.

Consider forming a relationship with an independent agent, who will check rates for you at a range of carriers.

► Pick a top-rated insurer

Saving is not only a matter of finding the lowest premium. An insurer can charge less in premiums but cost you more overall by lowballing loss estimates, hassling the repair shop to cut corners, and forcing you to pay extra for the manufacturer's replacement parts if you choose them over cheaper knockoffs. It can also unfairly jack up your premiums after an accident.

To get the best service when you need it most, consult our Ratings of 22 major insurers (see table on page 37), which are based on the experiences of 28,241 ConsumerReports.org subscribers who filed a claim between 2006 and the first half of 2009. Eighty-six percent of them were highly satisfied with the handling of their claims. Among the highest-rated groups were NJM, USAA, Amica, and Auto-Owners, with overall satisfaction

scores of 92 or higher. Availability for some insurers is limited by region or policyholder eligibility rules.

All rated companies did well, but some did better than others. Only 10 percent of Auto-Owners policyholders complained about claims-related problems, such as delays and disputes over fault or damages. By contrast, 26 percent of Commerce customers had a complaint in that area.

► Maintain a good credit score

For some consumers, the recession has dragged down credit scores and their close cousins, credit-based insurance scores,

which most insurers use to set auto premiums. In general, lower scores produce higher premiums, but the impact varies unpredictably because insurers use different rate-setting formulas. So if your insurer hiked your rate based on your score, start shopping for a lower premium.

Most states allow insurance scoring, so take steps to protect yourself: Regularly check and correct credit-reporting errors; avoid department-store credit cards, which can hurt your score; pay bills on time; and keep your credit balances low in relation to your credit limits. If your finances have been adversely affected by the

Are low-cost replacement bumpers safe?

A number of auto insurers have recommended or required use of aftermarket crash parts, which are often produced in overseas factories and can be significantly cheaper than the parts from original equipment manufacturers. Unfortunately, the parts might also be cheaper in quality.

Some safety experts are concerned about the internal bumper parts: a bumper beam, bumper isolators, foam, crush cans, brackets, and radiator supports. In a frontal crash, those pieces work together to properly transmit the crash pulse, or vibrations from impact energy that moves through the vehicle, to air-bag sensors and away from the passenger compartment to reduce or prevent injury.

"There's a lot of engineering that goes into making a crash-protection system," says David Zuby, chief research officer for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. "You can't willy-nilly change those parts because the system may not work the way it was designed."

In July, Ford reported that its engineers had found alarming

differences in two aftermarket parts tested. One bumper bar was made of mild steel, instead of the ultra-high-strength steel that the original Ford part uses. A radiator support was made of plastic instead of the magnesium used in the Ford part. In computer-simulated crash tests, the fakes changed the timing of the crash pulse, which might affect air-bag deployment.

"Differences in material could result in a difference in the timing of the air-bag deployment," says Mike Warwood, Ford's parts marketing and remanufacturing manager. "The air bag might deploy earlier than it should or later than it should. Or it might deploy when it shouldn't or not deploy at all when it should."

Ford's testing follows a demonstration last year by Toby Chess, a master collision-repair instructor, who used a reciprocating saw to easily slice through an aftermarket bumper bar. The saw couldn't cut through the original automaker bumper bar.

Some insurers have suspended use of the bumpers in repairs. In February, the Certified Automotive Parts Association, which certifies the quality of some aftermarket replacement parts (but not bumpers), tested a sample of aftermarket bumpers. It found "serious deficiencies" in metal hardness, material thickness, and fit.

Bottom line. Don't let your insurance company pressure you into using aftermarket collision-repair body parts, especially safety-related ones. If your car has already been repaired, check your invoices or ask your insurer to see whether aftermarket parts were used. If knockoffs were used, demand that they be replaced with original equipment.



BAD BUMPERS Low-cost aftermarket crash parts might also be low quality.

recession, military deployment, divorce, job loss, death of a family member, or medical problems, ask your insurer for an exception. You should also ask to be rescored once per year.

▶ Set the deductible right

A higher deductible reduces your premium because you pay more out of pocket if you have a claim. Hiking your deductible from \$200 to \$500 can cut your premium on collision by 15 to 30 percent. Go to \$1,000 and you could save 40 percent. If you have a good driving record and haven't had an at-fault accident in years, if ever, opting for a higher deductible on collision might be a good bet. Just make sure you can afford to pay it if your luck runs out.

▶ Review all of your coverage

Your liability coverage pays for bodily injury and property damage that you cause in accidents. Don't get caught short by reducing your liability limits to the state minimums. Buying more coverage might seem like an odd way to save, but the benefit comes if you have a costly claim, which can put your personal assets at risk. Buy standard 100/300/100 coverage, which pays for bodily injury up to \$100,000 per person and \$300,000 per accident, and property damage up to \$100,000. If you have a high net worth, boost bodily injury to \$250,000 per person and \$500,000 per accident.

One of every six drivers today may be uninsured, according to the Insurance Research Council. If you get hit by an uninsured at-fault driver, you'll have to pay for repairs out of your own pocket and sue the at-fault driver for damages. Protect yourself by buying uninsured/underinsured motorist protection with the same limits as your liability coverage.

You can probably cancel your collision and/or comprehensive coverage when the annual cost equals or exceeds 10 percent of your car's book value. Otherwise, you could



end up paying more over time than you would recoup for repair or replacement of your damaged, stolen, or totaled vehicle.

If you have another car that you can use while your vehicle is being repaired, you don't need to pay for rental-reimbursement coverage. Dump roadside assistance if you have an auto-club membership that's a better deal. Think carefully about personal-injury protection and medical-payments coverage: Forget it if you have good health coverage; keep it if you don't or if your usual passengers might not be well insured.

▶ Report reduced mileage

A major cost component in auto insurance is miles driven per year. The average is about 12,000. But if you've changed jobs and commute fewer miles, the lower mileage might translate into lower premiums. A new job that's only 6 miles closer than your old one could reduce your annual commuting miles by 3,000 and cut your annual premium by \$50. Let your insurer know if you've retired or lost your job; your reduced driving could cut 5 to 10 percent off your premiums.

Your insurer usually won't contact you to ask whether you're driving fewer miles, but it might find out if you're driving more. Twenty-eight of the 30 largest auto insurers have worked with Quality Planning Corp., a California company, to investigate whether their policyholders deserve rate increases.

For example, QPC compares individual policy information—say, coverage for a Ford F-250 pickup used for pleasure, not business—with hundreds of millions of records from numerous public and proprietary databases. If QPC finds the driver's name on, say, a database of licensed contractors, that raises a red flag. If your

16-year-old son buys electronics and mails in a warranty card including his name and address, that information can be cross-checked to see whether you've listed the teenager on your policy. If you listed yourself as married and pay a lower rate than you would if you were single, QPC might be able to check up on you.

When a red flag is raised, QPC calls the policyholder to ask questions about it, according to Bob U'Ren, senior vice president at QPC. The company reports the information to the insurer only if it's verified by the customer, U'Ren says.

▶ Watch crash repairs closely

Claims payment is where the rubber hits the road. Your insurer might push you to use shops in a direct-repair program (DRP) or use cheaper replacement parts, rather than the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) parts. Tests have found that some non-OEM parts fit poorly, are more prone to rust and corrosion, don't always meet federal safety standards, and may not provide good protection in a crash. (See box on page 35.)

In our survey, respondents' satisfaction with repairs was significantly lower among those who felt pressured to use DRP shops and non-OEM parts. And respondents who said they were pressured to use non-OEM parts had significantly more problems with their repairs.

▶ Choose your car wisely

Vehicle damage is the biggest cost component for auto insurers. So your premiums will vary by auto model. When comparing models, ask your car dealer to show you the "Relative Collision Insurance Cost Information Booklet," produced annually by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The Highway Loss Data Institute also posts data on collision, bodily injury and property-damage liability, and other types of losses by vehicle model at www.hldi.org/research/hldi/composite_intro.html. Or ask your insurer for premium quotes on the different models under consideration.

▶ Beware of scams

Plenty of crooks rip off drivers with staged accidents. Fraud investigators describe a scam in which a driver swoops in front of your car, then slams the brakes, forcing you to rear-end him. The result can be an at-fault accident claim against you, fake injuries, and exaggerated damage costs. You get the stress of a crash and legal

▶ DID YOU KNOW?

25%

That's the percentage of claims that took longer than two weeks for payment to be received, according to our survey.

claims, a bad mark on your driving record, and higher premiums for three years.

Avoid that by always following good driving practices, including maintaining a safe distance from other vehicles, not speeding, remaining alert at all times, and never tailgating. Keep a camera in your car to photograph a crash scene. Always call police to file an official report.

▶ Manage teenage-driver risk

Teenage drivers have higher accident rates, so adding a teenager to your policy can hike your costs by 50 to 100 percent. Immaturity and lack of driving experience help make motor-vehicle crashes the leading cause of death for U.S. teenagers. You can protect your child and cut your rates.

Make your child take a driving course before getting a license. Then make sure he or she complies with all laws and drives in a safe manner, with loss of driving privileges as the punishment for violations.

Consider having your teenager wait until age 18 or 19 to get a license, instead of the usual 16 in most states or as young as 14 in some. Inform your insurer if the child isn't licensed or is away at college without a car.

▶ Take advantage of discounts

Discounts are designed to attract the business of lower-risk drivers. Those drivers include students with good grades, new drivers who have taken a driver-training course, older drivers who have taken a refresher course, and members of affinity groups, such as college alumni and certain occupations and professions. Anti-theft and safety equipment can also get you a discount.

Insurers also offer discounts if you buy your homeowners, renters, or life-insurance policy from them. But be sure you check out total costs both ways: premiums from different insurers combined compared with single-insurer packages.

At least two insurers offer discounts in some states based on electronic monitoring of your driving habits. With Progressive's "Snapshot" discount, eligible drivers in 22 states plug an electronic data recorder into their car's data port (available only for cars from model year 1996 or later). The device tracks miles and time of day the car is driven and how often you brake suddenly. If the device shows that you drive less than average, avoid operation from midnight to 4 a.m., and don't stomp on the brake pedal, you might get up to a 30 percent discount. If it shows that you're a riskier

driver, you could see your rate go up by as much as 9 percent in some states. If you quit the program, Progressive won't use the data to set your premium, except in Alabama, where the insurer can use it for a year after you quit.

State Farm's "Drive Safe & Save" discount, available only in Ohio, uses your GM vehicle's OnStar system to track and trans-

mit monthly odometer readings. A 30- to 49-year-old driver who pays \$600 per year in premiums, for example, will get a 9 percent discount if he drives 13,000 miles per year and a 23 percent reduction if he drives only 6,000 miles. But if he's rated as "short annual mileage," less than 7,500 miles per year, he could end up paying more if the data show that he drives more.

Ratings Auto insurers

In order of reader score.

Insurer	Reader score	Survey results		
		Claims-related problems	Timely payment	Non-claims-related problems
NJM Insurance Group (New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Company)	94	●	●	●
USAA Group	93	●	●	●
Amica Mutual Group	93	●	○	●
Auto-Owners Insurance Group of Companies	92	●	●	●
State Auto Insurance Companies	90	○	●	○
Erie Insurance Group	89	○	●	○
State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company	89	○	○	○
The Auto Club Group	89	●	●	○
Auto Club Enterprises Insurance Group	88	○	●	○
California State Auto Group	88	○	○	○
American Family Insurance Group	88	○	●	●
The Hartford Financial Services Group	86	○	○	○
Berkshire Hathaway (Geico)	86	○	○	○
Mercury General Group	86	○	●	○
Liberty Mutual Insurance	85	○	○	○
Nationwide Group	85	○	○	●
Allstate Insurance Company	85	○	●	●
Farmers Insurance Group of Companies	85	○	○	●
The Progressive Group of Insurance Companies	84	○	●	○
Travelers	84	○	○	○
MetLife Auto & Home Group	84	○	●	○
Commerce Insurance	81	●	●	○

NJM Insurance Group



Amica



StateAuto Insurance Companies

Erie Insurance



Guide to the Ratings

Based on a survey of 96,681 CONSUMER REPORTS readers by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. **Reader score, claims-related problems, and timely payment** are based on the experiences of 28,241 respondents who filed claims that were settled or rejected from January 2006 to June 2009. Ratings for **non-claims related problems** are based on the experiences of all 96,681 respondents. Results might not reflect the experiences of the U.S. population as a whole. **Reader score** reflects overall satisfaction with claims handling. A score of 100 would mean all readers were completely satisfied; 80, very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied.

Differences of fewer than 4 points aren't meaningful. **Claims-related problems** is based on the percentage of readers reporting at least one problem during the course of their claim. **Timely payments** is based on claims that took longer than 14 days to settle. **Non-claims-related problems** reflects the percentage of all respondents who reported at least one problem with their insurer. Ratings are for insurance groups, which are composed in some instances of several affiliated companies. Ratings for companies within groups may vary, but group ratings represent the sum of experiences of Consumer Reports Online subscribers insured by the affiliated companies.



THREE STORIES Barbara Coldiron, Jay Shepard (top right), and Gary Terry each had a heart attack—but very different symptoms.

Surviving a heart attack

Know the signs and save a life

“My chest felt tight, and my hands were tingling. I thought I had slept on them wrong. I have no heart-attack risk factors, so I felt silly calling an ambulance, but I did when I noted that my heart rate was low. I also got nauseous and threw up. Tests showed that I had a heart attack!”

Barbara Coldiron, 55, Austin, Texas

“I kept having to stop a hike when I became winded and uncomfortable with what I thought was indigestion. Looking back, I think that’s when I had a heart attack. Although I continued to get out of breath easily, I didn’t have my heart checked until months later. It turned out I had a moderate to severe heart attack.”

Jay Shepard, 53, Essex Junction, Vt.

“I felt fine on the way to the airport that day. But I reached for my bag after clearing security and just collapsed. Fortunately, someone started CPR immediately and airport police had an AED on the scene within minutes. Their prompt response saved my life.”

Gary Terry, 62, Hurst, Texas

Three people, three descriptions of a heart attack. Would you recognize one? Do you know what tests are needed to diag-

nose heart disease and which ones aren’t? And if you’ve already been diagnosed, do you know which treatments are right for you and whom to see for the best care?

Those are big questions with critically important answers. Cardiovascular disease remains the No. 1 killer of men and women in the U.S., in part because heart-attack victims often don’t recognize the symptoms and delay getting care. And doctors sometimes push high-tech tests and treatments when simpler measures are safer, cheaper, and at least as effective.

This report will help you recognize heart disease and learn how to treat it. And we’ve teamed with the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, a nonprofit organization that represents physicians who operate on the chest, to present ratings of cardiac-surgery groups based on key performance measures for heart-bypass surgery.

What to watch for

“I think I expected a heart attack to be like on TV, with sudden severe chest pain. That’s not what I had at all,” Shepard says. In real life, heart attacks often start slowly, and many survivors describe them as

uncomfortable but not very painful.

Chest discomfort is the most common symptom, but women are somewhat more likely than men to experience others, such as nausea, shortness of breath, and pain in the back or jaw. Women are also prone to an especially deadly reaction—denial. “I have to admit, I was reluctant to call an ambulance and then terribly embarrassed when the EMTs initially said my heart seemed OK,” Coldiron says.

So how do you know which symptoms warrant concern? If an area is tender when you push on it or hurts more when you breathe deeply, you’re probably not having a heart attack. But if exertion triggers or worsens the discomfort, it might be heart-related chest pain. Symptoms such as cold sweats and difficulty breathing are red flags but can indicate other health problems.

You have to use your judgment, says Kathleen Cowling, D.O., vice president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. “It could be an odd pain in the middle of your back or indigestion that doesn’t go away with antacids. But if any of these symptoms is a new problem for you, it could be the beginning of a heart attack.”

Take action

If you suspect you're having a heart attack, call 911 immediately. Then chew and swallow one 325-milligram uncoated aspirin (or four 81-milligram baby aspirins) to help prevent clots from forming in your coronary arteries. Don't even think about driving to the hospital yourself or having someone take you.

If you're with someone who might be having a heart attack, ask whether an automatic electronic defibrillator (AED) is available, in case the person becomes unconscious and doesn't have a pulse. Those easy-to-use devices check heart rhythms and deliver a shock if needed.

Get the right tests

Of course, it's better to identify heart disease before you have an attack. But that's not always easy. For example, CT coronary angiography, a noninvasive test that provides a three-dimensional image of the heart, is widely touted in direct-to-consumer ads. But it carries a hefty radiation dose and can register false-positive results that can lead to additional invasive tests and procedures. Here are several tests and what you need to know about them:

Stress test. This measures the heart's function while it is stressed by exercise or, in some cases, medication. Some doctors use it for people with no heart symptoms as part of a routine exam. "That's generally a bad idea," says Steven Nissen, M.D., chairman of cardiovascular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. "The test is not as accurate in low-risk people and can trigger unnecessary and expensive follow-up." The only exceptions: older airline pilots, bus drivers, or others whose job affects public safety, or middle-aged or older people with multiple heart-risk factors who are just starting to exercise.

But for people with symptoms of heart disease, a stress test should usually be the first test ordered. And it should be combined with an electrocardiogram and one of two other tests, both of which produce an image of the heart: an echocardiogram (which uses sound waves) or a nuclear test (which uses radioactive material).

Coronary angiography. This is the gold standard for confirming heart disease in people with worrisome stress-test results. It involves threading a flexible tube from the groin into the coronary arteries and injecting a dye to make blockages visible on an X-ray. Going straight to such an invasive test is warranted only for people

DID YOU KNOW?

Common symptoms

- **Chest discomfort:** pain, pressure, squeezing, or fullness in the chest.
- **Upper-body symptoms:** pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, jaw, neck, or stomach.
- **General symptoms:** cold sweats, light-headedness, nausea, or shortness of breath.

at very high risk of having heart disease or have symptoms or an underlying condition that could make stress testing risky.

CT angiography and electron beam computed tomography. These tests have almost no role in treating people without symptoms of heart disease and are of limited use even for those who do have them. Supporters contend that the tests can help

determine how aggressively to treat people at moderate risk for heart disease—whether to prescribe drugs for someone with borderline-high cholesterol, for example. But doctors can usually accomplish the same thing by assessing a patient's risk based on such factors as blood pressure, family history, and in some cases his or her level of C-reactive protein, which reflects inflammation in the arteries. Even in people with suspected heart disease, results of CT angiography are often so uncertain that the test has to be followed up with standard angiography.

Get the right treatment

The hype for high-tech solutions extends to treatment, too, partly because doctors and hospitals have a financial incentive to keep the gadgets humming and partly because of persistent, outdated notions.

Aspirin for your heart

The website for Fasprin, aspirin that dissolves in your mouth, suggests that it works faster than other aspirin to limit damage during a heart attack. It also recommends Fasprin for preventing attacks. And although Bayer says that its Quick Release Crystals are not appropriate for cardiovascular use, it's easy to see why some people might think they're a good idea. Are those aspirin products really better than other kinds?

Help during attacks

Nothing has been proven to be better than chewing and swallowing an uncoated, 325-milligram tablet during a heart attack, says Steven Nissen, M.D., chairman of cardiovascular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic. You would have to take four Fasprins (81 milligrams) to match one regular aspirin. And Bayer says its Quick Release product—which contains 850 milligrams of aspirin, plus caffeine—hasn't been assessed for treating heart attacks and shouldn't be used for that purpose.

For prevention

Aspirin can help prevent heart attacks, too. But it's not for everyone, in part because it can also cause gastrointestinal bleeding. People at very high risk of heart attack or stroke should usually take low-dose aspirin. Men between 45 and 79 without that history should talk with a doctor to determine their 10-year heart-attack risk based on such factors as blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Women between 55 and 79 often also benefit, but only if they have a high 10-year

stroke risk. The therapy should generally be limited to those who are not at increased risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. And everyone should take these steps to maximize aspirin's benefits and minimize its risks:

Stick with low-dose, 81-milligram (baby) aspirin. Fasprin might be a good choice if you can't swallow pills, but it costs more than generic forms, and its fast action is largely irrelevant for prevention.

Protect your stomach. If your doctor says you need aspirin, but you have a history of stomach bleeding, ask about adding a stomach-protecting drug such as omeprazole (Prilosec and generic).

Don't stop on your own. That might elevate your risk beyond the original level by making the platelets in the blood more likely to form clots.

Don't mix with related pain relievers. Drugs such as ibuprofen (Advil and generic) or naproxen (Aleve and generic) multiply the risk of stomach problems. So try acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic) instead.



CLAIM CHECK
Generic baby aspirin is cheaper than Fasprin, whose fast action is largely irrelevant for prevention.

Heart disease is often described as something of a plumbing problem. Under that model, cardiologists pinpoint blockages using angiography and then use angioplasty, or percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI), to snake a balloon into an artery and inflate it, crushing deposits. In most cases, doctors also insert a metal stent to prop open the vessel.

That might relieve angina, or chest pain on exertion, but it won't necessarily prevent heart attacks. That's because dis-

eased arteries are often riddled with deposits too small and numerous to be treated with PCI—and most attacks occur not when a large deposit blocks an artery but when other factors cause smaller, less stable ones to rupture.

Yet some doctors recommend PCI immediately after angiography reveals coronary narrowing, often while the person is still on the table. Unless a patient has just had a heart attack or one appears imminent, there's usually plenty of time to dis-

cuss options, including drugs, exercise, and a healthful diet. People who take that approach are about as likely to become free of angina as those who also have PCI.

If testing reveals severe blockages, immediate PCI or bypass might be necessary. Bypass often makes sense when major coronary arteries are blocked; PCI might be an option if one or two vessels are blocked. Bypass or PCI can also be appropriate if symptoms don't improve after three to six months of drug therapy.

Heart-bypass surgery: 50 top-rated surgical groups

It's long been easier to make informed choices about cars or vacuums than about health-care providers. Now CONSUMER REPORTS has teamed with the Society of Thoracic Surgeons to present ratings of heart-bypass surgical groups based on how their results compare with national standards for survival, complications, and other measures.

The 50 groups listed here all received three

stars, meaning that their performance was rated as above average. Subscribers to ConsumerReportsHealth.org can get detailed information about all 221 rated groups, including the 166 two-star performers and the five one-star groups. Go to the website and click on the Doctors & Hospitals tab.

The ratings include groups that have agreed to let us publish their results. We will

periodically update the ratings, including data from additional groups that release their information to us. If you're considering a group that's not yet rated, you should still ask for its results. That's because many groups that have not shared their data with us have given their data to the STS—and should be willing to provide it to you. In fact, if a group can't or won't do that, you should keep looking.

Surgical groups are arranged alphabetically within states.

CALIFORNIA

East Bay Cardiac Surgery Center Medical Group Alta Bates Summit Medical Center, Oakland

Orange County Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeons Saint Joseph Hospital, Orange

Pomona Valley Cardiac Surgery Medical Group Pomona

COLORADO

Front Range Cardiac, Thoracic & Vascular Surgery Exempla Saint Joseph Hospital, Denver

Penrose Cardiothoracic Surgery Penrose-St. Francis Health Services, Colorado Springs

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Frederick Lough, M.D., and Surgeons George Washington University Hospital, Washington

Washington Regional Cardiac Surgery Washington Hospital Center, Washington

DELAWARE

Christiana Care Cardiac Surgery Beebe Medical Center, Lewes

FLORIDA

Cardiovascular Surgical Associates St. Joseph's Hospital, Tampa

Munroe Heart Munroe Regional Medical Center, Ocala

Winter Haven Hospital Bostick Heart Center Winter Haven

ILLINOIS

Prairie Heart Institute St. John's Hospital, Springfield

INDIANA

CorVasc MDs St. Vincent Heart Center of Indiana, Indianapolis

Fort Wayne Cardiovascular Surgeons Parkview Hospital, Fort Wayne

KENTUCKY

London Cardiovascular Surgery Saint Joseph Hospital, London

MARYLAND

Union Memorial Hospital Baltimore

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston University Cardiac & Thoracic Surgical Foundation Boston Medical Center, Boston

Division of Cardiac Surgery Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston

Mount Auburn Hospital Cambridge

North Shore Medical Center Salem

MICHIGAN

Cardiothoracic Surgeons of Grand Traverse Munson Medical Center, Traverse City

West Michigan Cardiothoracic Surgeons Mercy General Health Partners, Muskegon

MINNESOTA

Central Minnesota Heart Center St. Cloud Hospital, St. Cloud

Twin Cities Heart and Lung Mercy Hospital, Coon Rapids

NORTH CAROLINA

Asheville Heart Mission Hospital, Asheville

Forsyth Cardiac and Vascular Surgeons Forsyth Medical Center, Winston-Salem

Hawthorne Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgeons Presbyterian Hospital, Charlotte

Wake Forest University Physicians-Cardiothoracic Surgery Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, Winston-Salem

NORTH DAKOTA

Altru Health System Grand Forks

NEBRASKA

Nebraska Heart Institute Heart Hospital Lincoln

NEW JERSEY

Mid-Atlantic Surgical Associates Morristown Memorial Hospital, Morristown

The Valley Columbia Heart Center The Valley Hospital, Ridgewood

NEW YORK

Active International Cardiovascular Institute Good Samaritan Hospital, Suffern

Albany Medical Center Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery Albany

George L. Hicks, M.D., and Surgeons University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester

OREGON

Cardiothoracic Surgeons at the Oregon Heart and Vascular Institute Sacred Heart Medical Center, Springfield

PENNSYLVANIA

Consultants in Cardiovascular Disease Saint Vincent Health Center, Erie

Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Danville

ESSA Heart and Vascular Institute Pocono Medical Center, East Stroudsburg

Hamot Flagship CVT Surgeons Hamot Medical Center, Erie

Main Line Cardiothoracic Surgeons Lankenau Hospital, Wynnewood

Main Line Health Cardiothoracic Surgeons Paoli Hospital, Paoli

McGinnis Thoracic & Cardiovascular Surgical Associates Western Pennsylvania Hospital-Forbes Regional Campus, Monroeville

Venkat Machiraju, M.D., and Surgeons UPMC Shadyside Hospital, Pittsburgh

SOUTH CAROLINA

Providence Hospitals Sisters of Charity Providence Hospital, Columbia

TENNESSEE

Cardiovascular Associates Wellmont Holston Valley Medical Center, Kingsport

Cardiovascular Surgery Associates Saint Thomas Hospital, Nashville

Wellmont Cardiology Services Wellmont Bristol Regional Medical Center, Bristol

VIRGINIA

Centra Cardiothoracic Surgery Lynchburg General Hospital, Lynchburg

WASHINGTON

Harrison Health Partners Cardiothoracic Surgery Harrison Medical Center, Bremerton

Reports

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Lab tests

Ratings, reviews, recommendations

Top cordless phones

The latest phones are better than ever, especially when it comes to voice quality. The **B9 VTech** earned an Excellent score for voice quality in listening and speaking. That's a rarity for cordless phones, which usually lag behind corded phones in that regard. Other models are close behind.

The **B5 Panasonic** and **B7 Uniden** have a range extender on the extension's base that lets you take the handset much farther away than many other models. That's useful outdoors and reduces the chance that you'll hit a dead zone in your home. Other noteworthy features:

Energy saver. To extend battery life, the handsets of some models, such as the **A1** and **B5 Panasonic**, automatically reduce radio power when the base is nearby.

Better privacy. Multiple extensions can be handy for group calls to Grandma but a concern when you want privacy. Some models, such as the **A5** and **B7 Uniden**, have a button you can push to keep others from listening in on extensions.

More accessible. The **B3 Uniden** and **B13 Clarity** are designed for people with visual or hearing impairments. The buttons and displays are large and easier to read than most, and they amplify the volume of incoming sounds.

Easier screening. Some phones, such as the **A3 Panasonic**, let you assign callers a distinctive ring tone so that you know who is calling without looking at caller ID.

Cell linkage. More models, such as the **B4 AT&T**, can wirelessly connect to your cell-phone service using Bluetooth technology so that you can make and receive cell calls on your cordless phone. (The **B4 AT&T** and **B9 VTech** have two phone lines.)

Blackout backup. Several models, such as the **B2** and **B4 AT&T**, **B3 Uniden**, and **B10 Motorola**, have a corded phone on the base that will work when you lose electrical power in your home.



A1 Panasonic

Select Ratings

Best choices from our tests of 46 models.

Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results							
					Voice quality	Phone ease of use	Talk time (hr)	Range	Message quality	Answer ease of use	Greeting quality	Recording time (min.)
		Similar models, in small type, should offer comparable phone performance but have a different mix of features.		0 100								
				P F G V E								

A CORDLESS PHONES

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Panasonic KX-TG6512 KX-TG6511 \$40 KX-TG6513B \$80	\$ 60	80	●	●	16	●	NA	NA	NA	NA	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	AT&T EL51209 EL51109 \$20	45	77	●	●	17	●	NA	NA	NA	NA	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Panasonic KX-TG6413T	65	74	●	●	9	●	NA	NA	NA	NA	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	VTech LS6215-2	70	73	●	●	13	●	NA	NA	NA	NA	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Uniden DECT2060-2	65	70	●	●	15	●	NA	NA	NA	NA	2

B CORDLESS PHONES WITH ANSWERERS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	AT&T SL82318 SL82218 \$60	80	76	●	●	18	●	●	●	●	15	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	AT&T CL84209	95	76	●	●	16	●	●	●	●	13	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Uniden CE2A12998	90	76	●	●	13	●	●	●	○	25	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	AT&T TL86109 (2 lines)	170	75	●	●	10	●	●	●	○	18	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Panasonic KX-TG4053B	110	74	●	●	16	●	○	●	○	22	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	AT&T TL32100 TL32200 \$70	55	74	●	●	9	●	●	●	●	53	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Uniden DECT3380-3R	100	73	●	●	13	●	○	●	○	15	3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	VTech LS6325-4 LS6325-3 \$80	100	73	●	●	13	●	●	●	●	14	4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	VTech DS6151 (2 lines)	80	73	●	●	9	●	●	●	●	13	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Motorola L402C	60	72	●	●	18	○	●	●	●	9	1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Panasonic KX-TG1032S KX-TG1033S \$80	55	72	●	●	21	●	●	●	●	16	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Uniden DECT2080-2	70	71	●	●	16	●	●	●	●	13	2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Clarity D613 D613C \$95	90	68	●	○	16	●	●	●	●	56	1

Capable camcorders

Our latest tests of standard- and high-definition camcorders turned up seven recommended models, including two HD models we chose as CR Best Buys: the **A5 JVC**, \$750, and **A10 Sony**, \$600. The SD camcorders we recommend cost even less: \$250 for the **B3 JVC** and \$350 for the **B2 Canon**.



Prices in general aren't too much lower than last year's, but you'll get more powerful and higher-performing camcorders. They're easier to carry and packed with more features.

Like digital cameras, most camcorders store video on flash media in the form of internal storage, removable memory card, or both. There are still some hard-drive models, although not as many as before. The hard drives have capacities as large as 240 gigabytes, providing many hours of recording time. Manufacturers have discontinued DVD and MiniDV tape models.

Here are the details from our tests:

You'll save with standard def. If you're on a budget or don't plan to watch your video on an HDTV, an SD model might be all you need. Two models, the **B2 Canon** and **B3 JVC**, offer good image quality and were judged easy to use. They have longer zooms, 37x for the Canon and 39x for the JVC, than most HD models. The Canon also has excellent battery life.

HD gives you better quality. More than half of our HD models, including all five recommended ones, provide picture quality that we rated Very Good in normal shooting conditions. Two of them, the **A4 Sony** and **A5 JVC**, also did very well in low light. That can be critical when you're shooting evening events outdoors, indoor sports, or in an auditorium.

Autofocus varies. HD models were more likely to have better autofocus than SD models. Consider one of our recommended HD models if you want an autofocus feature rated Very Good.

You'll pay for important extras. Like digital cameras, new camcorders are unlikely to have a viewfinder. The move to cut size, weight, and price might account for that. Three tested models have viewfinders, including the **A2 Sony**, but they all cost more than \$1,000. Those models also have the largest touch-screen LCDs, which our tests show all had very good quality.

Ratings

In performance order, within types.

CR Best Buy Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model (format)	Price	Overall score	Test results							Features			
					Normal light	Low light	Ease of use	Autofocus	Audio quality	Image stabilizer	Display quality	Optical zoom	Viewfinder	Battery life (min.)	
				0											
				100											
					P	F	G	V	G	E					

A HIGH-DEFINITION CAMCORDERS

	1	Canon Vixia HF S21 (flash memory)	\$1,400	71	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	10x	●	81
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Sony HDR-CX550V (flash memory)	1,000	65	●	○	●	○	○	●	●	10x	●	110
	3	Panasonic HDC-HS700 (hard drive)	1,400	65	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	12x	●	101
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Sony HDR-XR350V (hard drive)	1,000	62	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	12x	●	115
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	JVC Everio GZ-HM550 (flash memory)	750	61	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	10x	●	85
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Canon Vixia HF M31 (flash memory)	800	61	●	○	●	○	○	●	●	15x	●	96
	7	Panasonic HDC-HS60 (hard drive)	700	61	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	25x	○	102
	8	JVC Everio GZ-HM1 (flash memory)	1,050	59	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	10x	○	164
	9	JVC Everio GZ-HD620 (hard drive)	575	57	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	30x	○	96
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Sony HDR-XR150 (hard drive)	600	56	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	25x	○	101
	11	JVC Everio GZ-HD500 (hard drive)	490	55	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	20x	○	104
	12	Canon Vixia HF R11 (flash memory)	700	54	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	20x	○	66
	13	Samsung HMX-H204 (flash memory)	500	54	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	20x	○	137

B STANDARD-DEFINITION CAMCORDERS

	1	Panasonic SDR-H85 (hard drive)	350	54	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	70x	○	156
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Canon FS 31 (flash memory)	350	52	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	37x	○	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	JVC Everio GZ-MS230 (flash memory)	250	52	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	39x	○	109
	4	Sony DCR-SX83 (flash memory)	400	51	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	25x	○	97
	5	Samsung SMX-F44 (flash memory)	300	49	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	52x	○	199
	6	Sony DCR-SR88 (hard drive)	400	48	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	60x	○	97
	7	Samsung SMX-C24 (flash memory)	300	45	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	10x	○	128

A camcorder that works with multiple lenses

This summer Sony introduced what it called "the world's first consumer-oriented camcorder with interchangeable lenses," the Sony NEX-VG10.

This \$2,000 high-definition Handycam uses the same lenses that fit Sony's NEX-3 and NEX-5 SLR-like cameras. With an adapter, it can also use SLR lenses compatible with

Sony's Alpha series SLRs. To get you started, it comes with an NEX-compatible 18- to 200-mm E series lens.

The NEX-VG10 includes an electronic viewfinder, a swiveling 3-inch LCD, and a pro-level stereo microphone. It can also shoot 14-megapixel still photographs. We will test it for an upcoming issue.



CHECKING UP Senior project leader Tunde Akinleye screens jewelry for lead and other toxic metals.

Heavy metals

Despite progress, our tests still find products with lead and cadmium

TWO YEARS after sweeping rules sought to limit lead in children's products, another toxic heavy metal, cadmium, is causing concern. And though retailers and manufacturers are increasingly vigilant, lead continues to appear in some items.

Lead and cadmium have accounted for the recall of millions of products in the past few months alone. The list includes painted furniture, jewelry, children's clothing, McDonald's drinking glasses, and even trinkets that kids receive at doctors' and dentists' offices.

In our latest spot check of the marketplace and in our interviews and review of documents, CONSUMER REPORTS uncovered several worrisome findings:

No clear standards for cadmium.

Even as companies intensify scrutiny of lead in products, cadmium is a newly recognized threat. In our tests, we found a hair barrette with a high level of total cadmium. Many other countries, including

Sweden, have moved to limit cadmium in various products, but standards in the U.S. are just being drafted.

What's a children's product? The nation's lead standard applies to items for children under 13. But if a product is not designed or intended primarily for children, it can contain more lead. We found a cell-phone charm with lead levels so high that it would be illegal if it were considered a children's product. The charm, which carries no age-related warning label, could appeal to those 12 or younger and is sold by Claire's, a store that caters to preteens as well as teenagers.

What stays on the shelves? More oversight is needed of how lead-tainted products are pulled off store shelves. Our investigation turned up a children's vinyl raincoat with parts that exceeded legal lead limits for children's products. The company sells a reformulated version that contains only low or trace amounts of lead. But we were able to buy the original

version late last year, after the deadline for removal of such products.

Concern over cadmium

Cadmium is a carcinogen that is a by-product of refining lead, zinc, copper, and other metals. One of its primary commercial uses has been in rechargeable batteries, such as those found in cordless phones and power tools.

Cadmium, like lead, could be turning up as a contaminant in consumer products imported from China in part because a cottage industry has developed there to melt down computer parts and other electronic waste. That process produces aggregate metals for items such as inexpensive jewelry, says David Carpenter, M.D., director of the Institute for Health and the Environment at the University at Albany, in New York. And although there are less-toxic alternatives, cadmium is also used as a pigment, a stabilizer in plastics, and a rust protectant for auto parts.

As this issue went to press, the Consumer Product Safety Commission was still working on regulations to limit the use of cadmium. Currently the CPSC says toys must comply with the limit of 75 parts per million (ppm) for soluble cadmium in surface coatings established by ASTM, an international organization that develops voluntary standards.

"We are working on a new specific limit for cadmium in children's products separate from the current limit in surface coatings for toys, and that's gone through independent scientific review," CPSC spokesman Scott Wolfson says. Sweden began limiting the use of cadmium in many products in the 1970s, and the European Union more recently set new rules.

Long-term exposure to cadmium has been linked to a host of adult health problems, including high blood pressure and age-related macular degeneration, as well as cancer of the lung, breast, and kidney. Children's developing bodies are especially vulnerable to damage from both lead and cadmium, but long-term exposure even at relatively low levels can be hazardous to anyone.

"Current research on cadmium's health effects is less than one-tenth of that for lead because lead was added to gasoline and paint before its ban and people never expected to see cadmium in consumer products like toys and jewelry," says Aimin Chen, an assistant professor at the University of Cincinnati College of Medi-

cine who specializes in environmental and pediatric epidemiology. "But there is no question that adults and children should limit their exposure to both of these very toxic substances." The U.S. banned the use of lead in gasoline and house paint in the 1970s. Since a flood of lead-tainted toy recalls led to the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act in 2008, it is illegal to manufacture or sell children's products that contain more than 300 ppm of total lead. Limits for lead in paint and surface coatings used on any consumer product are down to 90 ppm from 600 ppm. Lead still can be used legally in other ways in many other consumer products.

What we found

Our latest tests come four years after we began routinely checking consumer products for heavy metals. We examined a variety of children's products and household items that seemed likely to contain heavy metals, based on past recalls and our own previous tests. They included children's jewelry, metal barrettes, and vinyl children's products and window shades. We also screened items such as pens, sunglasses, and lipstick for lead, cadmium, and mercury, another toxic heavy metal.

Of the more than 30 products we tested using an initial screening method called X-ray fluorescence spectrophotometry (XRF), 14 showed relatively high levels. They were sent for further testing to an outside lab to determine total amounts of lead, cadmium, and mercury. Samples of three items were found to contain levels of heavy metals near or above regulatory limits or levels that could be hazardous under certain circumstances.

A green clover-shape cell-phone charm sold at the retailer Claire's caused the greatest concern. Some we tested contained levels exceeding 100,000 ppm of total lead. Given those levels, a child who accidentally swallowed a charm could be at risk for lead poisoning. Although the charm is not marketed specifically to children 12 and under, it could appeal to that age group or it could be accessible to them if a parent or older child has one.

Federal rules say that the 300-ppm lead limit applies to all children's products,

which the 2008 law defines as "designed or intended primarily for children 12 years of age or younger." Similar questions of age might also arise with another item we tested, the Revlon Couture Hair Accessory, a barrette made of metal and decorated with small colored rhinestones. Samples of some tested positive for total cadmium at levels as high as 293,000 ppm, though potential for significant cadmium exposure through normal use is low. The barrette is not marketed to children but it could interest and be accessible to them.

The cadmium recalls announced this year were based on language in the Federal Hazardous Substances Act that prohibits the makers of children's products from using chemicals or metals in amounts that the CPSC considers "hazardous." But some manufacturers and retailers continue to argue that even if an item containing high lead levels might be appealing to preteenagers or is sold in stores popular with that age group, the product itself is not "intended primarily for children" and therefore does not violate the law.

It's up to the CPSC to determine whether



Kidorable raincoat

such an item qualifies as a children's product, but it has not yet officially defined the criteria to be used in making that call. "CPSC is currently in the middle of federal rule making to define what is a children's product and establish the assessment criteria," Wolfson says.

Policing the stores

Even if a product is reformulated to eliminate contamination from lead, previous versions might remain on store shelves. That appears to have been the case based on what we found in our tests of some Kidorable raincoats with a bumblebee design and made of PVC plastic. That upscale garment is marketed for toddlers and preschoolers for \$36. In December 2009 we purchased one raincoat at



Claire's cell-phone charm

Recent notable recalls

Recall date	Item recalled	Total number recalled	When & where sold	Type of heavy metal	Where manufactured
July 13, 2010	Justice children's jewelry (necklaces, bracelets, and earrings)	137,000	Justice and Limited Too stores and online from November 2008 through February 2010	Cadmium	China
June 30, 2010	Children's Happy Charm bracelets and football rings	66,200 bracelets and 2,200 rings	Distributed at doctors' and dentists' offices nationwide from June 2005 through March 2010	Cadmium	China
June 17, 2010	Children's belts	105,150	Target stores and Target.com from December 2008 through December 2009	Lead	China
June 4, 2010	"Shrek Forever After 3D" drinking glasses	12 million	McDonald's from May 2010 through June 2010	Cadmium	U.S.
April 7, 2010	Decorative wood chests and tables	7,000	Major department and furniture retail stores from November 2001 through November 2009	Lead in surface paint	China, Philippines, and Vietnam
April 1, 2010	Bauer children's hockey sticks	67,000 in U.S. and 60,000 in Canada	Sporting-goods stores nationwide from February 2005 through March 2010	Lead in surface paint and decals	China

a New York area department store and another online through Amazon.com. We found lead levels that exceeded 1,000 ppm in most of the yellow parts of the coat that we tested, many times higher than the legal limit. And it's possible that some of that lead could be transferred to hands through repeated handling.

In January and May 2010 we purchased additional Kidorable bumblebee coats that carried labels saying "100% lead-free." Our tests showed that parts of those coats contained only low or trace levels of total lead, well below federal limits. Given the background levels of lead in the environment, it's nearly impossible for any product to live up to a "100% lead-free" claim, so finding those small amounts was not surprising.

Kidorable spokeswoman Christy Katzfey says the company reformulated its PVC products in late 2008 to comply with the new consumer product safety law and began using the lead-free labeling on its raincoats and backpacks in January 2009. In light of our findings, consumers shopping for Kidorable bumblebee raincoats should look for new coats with the "lead-free" label and take a pass on nonlabeled hand-me-downs or coats from yard sales.

Some assurances that products are lead free can be deceiving. Judy Braiman, president of Empire State Consumer Project, a nonprofit advocacy group in Rochester, N.Y., purchased a musical-note necklace at a local store in February 2010. The label accompanying the jewelry states that it is made in China and is "Lead Free." Yet testing showed the clasp on the necklace contained up to 912,000 ppm



Revlon
Couture
Hair
Accessory

of total lead and that the pendant contained 288,000 ppm of cadmium. Those results came from the lab of Jeffrey Weidenhamer, a chemistry professor at Ashland University in Ohio, who alerted the CPSC. Weidenhamer said cadmium's presence in inexpensive jewelry is not new. He said his tests of more than 600 jewelry items from 2006 through May 2010 found almost 20 percent gave XRF readings of at least 10,000 ppm of cadmium.

Christine Canny, a Brooklyn entrepreneur who co-owns a jewelry business called FortuneKeeper that was launched in 2009, purchased beads and other components for her products from a Chinese supplier that marketed them as lead free. She had them tested at a lab and found beads that contained more than 235,000 ppm of lead. "We won't use the beads on our products, so they'll just sit in our office until we know how to safely get rid of them," Canny says. "Why is it so hard to make something that is safe?"

Retailers make a move

In May 2010, after jewelry containing cadmium was reportedly found in Walmart stores, Wal-Mart said that it would voluntarily adopt European safety standards for cadmium and other heavy metals.

Wal-Mart says that it requires all mouthable components of many children's products be tested by CPSC-accredited labs and certified to meet a 75-ppm limit on soluble cadmium and various

limits set for other heavy metals. Some states have imposed their own limits for lead or cadmium, which can cause confusion over labeling. For instance, Dream Dazzlers, a children's product containing a light-up magic wand, tiara, and earrings made for Toys "R" Us, carries a label warning that the product contains lead. That sounds alarming, but Toys "R" Us says it had to use the label because Illinois requires the warning if a product has more than 40 ppm of lead. But the item meets the federal limits for lead in toys.

What lies ahead

Standards for lead are expected to tighten further in August 2011, when limits for total lead in children's products drop to 100 ppm, if the CPSC determines it is technologically feasible to meet that more stringent standard. However, making products safer depends not only on imposing tough limits and testing requirements for contaminants such as heavy metals but also on oversight. The CPSC is still sorting out enforcement issues for certain aspects of the legislation, although it does respond to complaints.

The agency requires manufacturers or importers of children's products to submit samples of a product to an accredited third-party testing facility to ensure the item is within federal limits. And it tests children's products seized at ports, warehouses, and retail stores to ensure compliance with federal standards. If the items do not comply, it will investigate the manufacturer, the testing facility, and others in the supply chain.

Whether the agency has the proper staffing for such responsibilities remains to be seen. The CPSC currently has fewer than 20 staff members working directly with Customs and Border Protection inspectors and officials at the top 10 U.S. ports and in Washington.

Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of CONSUMER REPORTS, urges the CPSC to develop a regulation for cadmium limits for all children's products and believes that manufacturers, distributors, and retailers should thoroughly test for all heavy-metal concentrations before bringing products to market. The limits on lead are well defined for children's products, but lead and cadmium also should be regulated in products that can result in exposure via direct ingestion, such as cell-phone charms or garden hoses from which consumers might drink.

What you can do

- Consider do-it-yourself test kits, which can be useful though limited screening tools. Our September 2008 tests found that Homax Lead Check and Abotex Lead Inspector kits were somewhat reliable in detecting surface lead but were not good at detecting lead within a product.
- Don't allow children to have or play with cheap metal jewelry. If your children tend to put things in their mouths, add to that brass keys, barrettes, and charms.

- Take an inventory of your children's toys and check them against the recall list at www.cpsc.gov, which has photos and descriptions of products recalled for lead or cadmium. Also check the list if you're buying used items.
- Don't drink from garden hoses, which might contain lead that can leach into water. As a precaution, wash your hands immediately after handling power cords, extension cords, and even strings of holiday lights.

Cars

SPECIAL SECTION

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Should you plug in?

Electric cars let you drive gas-free but aren't right for everyone

YOU'LL SOON BE hearing a lot of buzz—and a healthy dose of sales hype—about a new wave of electric cars that will begin humming down our roads. The first cars to come from major automakers will be the much-publicized Chevrolet Volt and the Nissan Leaf, each expected to go on sale in selected areas by the end of this year. And several other models from Ford, Honda, Mitsubishi, Toyota, and other companies will follow in the next couple of years.

Our auto experts have driven prototypes and preproduction models of most of the forthcoming electric cars and have found them to be very quiet, quite quick, and viable alternatives to conventional cars. In a recent CONSUMER REPORTS survey, more than a quarter of respondents said they are likely to consider a plug-in electric car for their next vehicle.

Electric vehicles (EVs) allow drivers to commute moderate distances using no gasoline and producing no tailpipe emissions. They can reduce overall driving costs for some people. And EVs can be charged by simply plugging them into a household wall outlet, although the time it takes to recharge depends on the vehicle and the electrical circuit.

But those cars require basic changes in

driving habits and often some hefty household electrical work. EVs have a limited driving range on electric power, they can take hours to recharge, and they cost more than similar conventional cars. The life expectancy and replacement cost of the battery packs remain question marks, and in most regions the ability to recharge in public areas is very limited.

Whether you will save money depends on many variables.

Before you consider plugging in, you should weigh all factors—cost, convenience, and environmental impact—and fully understand the pros and cons of EVs.

What is an EV?

Plug-in electric cars represent the next step beyond hybrids for consumers who want to cut their gasoline consumption. A full-hybrid car continuously switches between a gasoline engine and an electric motor to power the car, and the gas engine recharges the battery while the car is driv-

en. By contrast, an EV can go much farther using only electric power, but it needs to be plugged in to fully recharge.

EVs will be released regionally at first, and it could be months or years before they are readily available nationwide. There are three main types of plug-in models:

Dedicated EVs. The Nissan Leaf is an example of a pure battery-electric car that runs solely on its electric motor and has no gasoline engine. On a full charge, the Leaf can go up to 100 miles before it needs recharging. Nissan says that this is enough to accommodate 90 percent of Americans' daily driving needs. Because dedicated EVs need large batteries, it can take 8 hours or more to recharge, even with a heavy-duty 220-volt outlet. It can take much longer with a regular household 110-volt outlet.

Extended-range EVs. That is how GM classifies the Volt. The car runs only on its electric motor and can go up to 40 miles solely on electric power. The company says that range will be enough for more than 75 percent of American commuters to drive gasoline-free to work and back. After the battery's charge drops to a certain level, a small gasoline engine kicks in to provide enough additional electrical power to let the car continue driving. That extends the Volt's overall range to more than 300 miles before it needs to stop for a fill-up or recharge. Because it has a smaller battery than a dedicated EV, Chevrolet estimates that the Volt can be charged in about 4 hours on a 220-volt outlet or about 8 to 10 hours on a standard 110-volt line.

Plug-in hybrids. They are essentially conventional gas/electric hybrid cars with a larger battery that allows them to operate on electric power more of the time, although they can't go gas-free for long stretches. Last year, we had our 2008 Toyota Prius test car converted to a plug-in setup. We found that the added battery power helped boost the car's gas mileage by more than 50 percent, but only for the first 35 miles of driving, at which point the battery's charge was depleted and the Prius reverted to its regular hybrid operation. Then fuel economy dropped slightly below that of a standard Prius because of

► Chevrolet Volt late 2010

We got some early impressions of a preproduction Volt when Chevrolet brought one to our test track. GM says this four-passenger hatchback can drive up to 40 miles on electric power and estimates that it can go an additional 300 miles on its gasoline engine. The car takes about 4 hours to fully charge on a 220-volt circuit, or 8 to 10 hours on a 110-volt line. We found the Volt to be a quiet, comfortable, although somewhat heavy-feeling car that rides well and has strong acceleration. Its hatchback and folding rear seat add versatility. On the dash, touch-sensitive pads replace conventional buttons, which takes getting

used to. We'll get more insight when we buy our own car for a full test. The Volt will first be sold in California and in the cities of Austin,

Texas; New York; and Washington. The price is \$41,000 (before tax credits).

Or it can be leased for \$350 per month. See our video on www.ConsumerReports.org.



the extra battery weight. While Toyota is field-testing plug-in Priuses for commercial use, no plug-in hybrids are expected for retail customers until 2012. Independent shops can convert existing hybrids, but we found that the cost of our plug-in conversion—about \$11,000—far outweighed the gas savings.

Four questions to consider

Your answers can help you determine whether an EV is right for you.

How far do you drive? If you will be using the car only for running local errands or you have a relatively short commute, say 20 to 30 miles each way, a dedicated electric car with a 100-mile range, such as the Leaf, would probably fit your needs and provide enough buffer to allow you to make some side trips. With an extended-range EV, distance is not a factor if you don't mind using gasoline. Of course, if you can plug in while you're away from home, you'll extend your electric driving range. Longer trips with a dedicated EV would require careful planning on where you can recharge.

Keep in mind that a car's electric range can vary significantly, depending on how much load is put on the batteries. EV engineers say that without a gas engine to produce extra power, heating or cooling the cabin, running lights and wipers, and listening to the stereo can consume as much as half of the battery's power, which cuts well into your driving range.

Will an EV save you money? Depending on your electricity rates, driving an EV can be less expensive than filling up at the pump. Electricity costs an average of 11 cents per kilowatt-hour in the U.S. At about 3 miles per kWh (the rough efficiency engi-

▶ Mini E 2011

This all-electric version of the Mini Cooper is quick, smooth, and quiet. But the huge battery pack takes up the whole backseat, turning the car into a two-seater. Lifting your foot off of the accelerator pedal activates the car's regenerative braking system, which causes the car to begin slowing even before you touch the brake pedal; that takes getting used to. BMW is still leasing some first-generation Mini E's as part of a special program (see "My Year of Driving Electric," on page 51). But it's already developing a replacement, which is based on the BMW1 Series and is due out next year.



neers estimate for most of today's EVs), that's about 4 cents a mile. With gas costing about \$2.80 a gallon, a car such as the Toyota Corolla, which gets very good fuel economy of 30 mpg, would cost about 9 cents a mile for fuel. But electrical rates vary widely, so check your local rates.

You'll pay extra to buy an electric car. The Leaf's starting price is \$33,600, while the Volt will retail at \$41,000. Both include destination charges. Prices for a Toyota Prius hybrid, the most fuel-efficient car in our Ratings, range from about \$22,000 to \$28,000. To attract early buyers, the federal government is making the first 200,000 EV buyers from each automaker eligible for a \$7,500 federal tax credit. Regional incentives will also be available. California will offer an additional \$5,000 tax credit for zero-emission vehicles, including the Leaf.

Consumers will also be able to lease the Leaf or Volt for about \$350 per month, which is similar to leases for many conventional cars.

An EV's high price reflects its expensive battery pack. "EVs can do a reasonable

range, but they can't do it at a reasonable cost given today's batteries," says Ron Cogan, editor and publisher of the Green Car Journal. The Volt's batteries are estimated to cost \$8,000 or more, and the Leaf's about \$18,000.

No one knows how long those batteries will last before they'll need replacement. And because they use a new lithium-ion technology, there's no track record with which to gauge them, as there is with the nickel-metal-hydrate batteries in today's hybrids. Still, according to our Annual Auto Reliability Survey, most hybrids have been very reliable.

The Leaf and Volt will carry 8-year/100,000-mile warranties on their battery packs and related hardware.

How will you charge your car? You can charge an EV at any household outlet, but the type of circuit dramatically affects the charging time. A standard 110-volt outlet might work for charging the Volt, but you could be hard-pressed to charge a dedicated EV overnight. A heavy-duty 220-volt, 30- or 40-amp circuit, similar to an outlet for an electric clothes dryer, is

What you'll feel behind the wheel

The first thing you'll notice when you start an electric car is that, well, nothing happens. It's silent, with only a small dash light telling you that the car is ready to go. As you depress the accelerator pedal, the car will begin moving. But rather than hearing the rev of an engine, you'll hear only the sound of tires rolling on pavement.

You'll quickly find that an EV has brisk acceleration, thanks to the inherently high torque of an electric motor. Once the car is up to highway speed, you might hear a light, high-pitched whine from the electric motor mixing in with the road and wind

noise. Dash displays will tell you the level of the battery's charge and how many miles you have left before you need to recharge it.

When you brake lightly, the pedal may feel a bit grabby because of the extra force of the regenerative braking system. This uses the braking energy to help recharge the battery by initially slowing the car using the electric motor before activating the mechanical brakes. The car also might feel a bit heavy when cornering, due to the large battery pack. But overall, driving an EV is not very different from driving a



conventional car, except that you get to pass by gas stations without a second thought. And when you're done driving, of course, you have to plug in the car so that it'll be ready for your next excursion.

much more practical. If one is needed, installation could cost \$300 to \$2,000, depending on the home's existing wiring and location of the outlet, according to Mark Duvall, director of the electric transportation program at the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), an electric-utility industry organization.

You'll also need a charger. The Leaf and Volt have an onboard 110-volt, so-called Level I charger. A faster 220-volt Level II charger for the Leaf sells for about \$700, but other Level II chargers are currently retailing for about \$1,200. GM and Nissan are setting up special services to help EV buyers assess their charging and electrical needs. Before you buy a Leaf or Volt, a dealer will have an electrician inspect your home, give you an estimate, and ensure the work meets local building-code requirements.

To defray the expense, the federal government has earmarked \$130 million to provide 15,000 free Level II chargers. Those will be targeted in the cities where automakers first plan to roll out EVs. Many of those chargers will be installed in the garages of apartment buildings, in malls, and in other public places to help EV drivers. One program, ChargePoint America, will also pay up to \$1,200 in installation costs for selected residential customers.

What will you pay for charging? Many utilities offer a wide variety of rate plans, so it's important to find out which is best for you. High electric rates can offset any savings at the pump. For example, at our Auto Test Center in Connecticut, where average utility rates are a high 19 cents per kWh, a vehicle such as the Volt may be no cheaper to run than a Toyota Prius.

Off-peak rates are usually lower because you're taking advantage of the excess ca-

► Ford Focus EV 2011

The Focus EV is an all-electric, four-door sedan that is based on the redesigned 2012 Focus. Prototypes have had a 23-kilowatt-hour, lithium-ion battery pack that Ford says will give the car a 100-mile range and take about 6 hours to recharge with a 220-volt charger. It will compete directly with the Nissan Leaf.



capacity that power plants have at night. For Volt buyers in Detroit, for example, charging off-peak in the summer would cost 5.65 cents per kWh, or about 50 cents for a full charge. That's less than half of what it costs during summer peak hours.

Southern California Edison, which covers a region where most electric cars will initially be sold, plans to launch a website to help EV buyers analyze which of its rate plans will be cheapest for them, says Steve Powell, manager of plug-in electric vehicle readiness for the company. One plan is specially designed for EV drivers, with lower off-peak rates of 11 cents per kWh. But that plan requires the installation of a second electric meter, which may cost you more up front.

California buyers need to be especially careful when choosing a plan because the state's Public Utility Commission has set caps on usage for the lowest rates in basic plans. So unless you choose an appropriate plan, charging an electric car can quickly boost you to a higher rate.

Virtually all electric utilities are developing special rates for electric cars and for off-peak usage, Duvall, from EPRI, says. But such rate plans require the installa-

tion of Smart meters, which can monitor the time of day when electricity is used.

Many areas also have several electricity providers, so it can help to shop around for the best rates.

Call your utility company before you buy an electric car, Powell says. That gives the company an opportunity to inspect power lines and transformers in your area and make any needed upgrades before you add such a large load to the system. Those upgrades are free to the consumer.

Automakers are working on ways to help you optimize charging performance. For example, Nissan says that Leaf buyers will be able to schedule charging or check on their car's charge status online, and that a similar mobile application is being developed. Chevrolet Volt buyers can download their electric utility's rates to the car using GM's OnStar system. Then the car can charge only when the rates are lowest. Drivers can also preset the interior temperature of either car remotely so that the cabin is heated or cooled initially while it's still plugged in, to optimize battery range. Ford, which plans to roll out two electric vehicles next year, has developed an add-on to its Sync system that will allow their customers to use Microsoft's Hohm application to set charge times, update charge status, and perform other functions over the Internet from their computers or phones.

► Nissan Leaf December 2010

The Leaf is an all-electric, five-passenger, four-door hatchback. Nissan says it will go about 100 miles between charges and will take about 8 hours to fully charge on a 220-volt circuit. The Leaf's base price will be \$33,600, including destination fee, but buyers will qualify for a \$7,500 federal tax rebate. Nissan will offer leases for \$349 per month. It will initially be sold in selected metro areas of Arizona, California, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington. Nissan expects it to be available nationally by the end of 2011.



The big picture

Electric vehicles are an important part of the federal government's overall energy policy because of their potential to reduce the nation's dependence on petroleum and curb greenhouse-gas emissions. President Obama has said that he wants to see 1 million plug-in cars on American roads by 2015. California law demands that the six largest American and Japanese auto-

makers combined sell at least 12,500 electric vehicles in the state by 2014.

According to a joint study by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the EPRI, if, by 2050, 20 percent of American cars were plug-ins with an electric range of 20 miles, carbon-dioxide emissions (associated with global warming) could be reduced by at least 163 million metric tons. Using 2008 figures from the Federal Highway Administration, that could mean a savings of 550 million gallons of gasoline a year, or 22.2 billion gallons by 2050. Advocates expect that plug-in cars can reduce energy demand by improving cars' efficiency and helping power plants put off-peak capacity to use.

Automakers also need to build electric cars to meet new 35-mpg fuel-economy requirements coming in 2015. "There's no question that EVs have a role to play" in meeting those standards, says Charles Territo, of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers in Washington, D.C. But it remains unclear how electric cars will be counted in fuel-economy ratings. Because they use little or no gasoline, the Environmental Protection Agency is formulating an mpg equivalent that will be used on the cars' window stickers in place of the familiar mpg estimates.

Although EVs produce no tailpipe emissions when they're running on elec-

tric power, the energy is generated at power plants that do produce emissions. Still, according to the NRDC/EPRI study, air quality would improve in most of the U.S. because of the electric vehicles' overall more efficient use of energy, especially in areas that primarily use hydro, natural gas, or nuclear power. Even in areas where electricity is produced by plants that burn coal, a dirtier fuel, plug-in cars would emit fewer greenhouse gases than similar-sized gas vehicles, the study notes. (Most electricity in the U.S. is made from coal.) But some areas near coal-fired power plants could see increased particulate emissions.



► Tesla Roadster on sale now

This is a \$111,000 all-electric, two-seat sports car that's based on the Lotus Elise and has a fiberglass body. It was first sold in 2008. Tesla claims that it can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in under 4 seconds and has a range of 245 miles, thanks to its massive 53-kilowatt-hour battery pack. A full charge takes 3.5 hours on a proprietary 240-volt, 70-amp charger.

In a brief drive, we found that the Roadster lives up to its sports car credentials, with blistering acceleration and go-cart handling. But the stiff ride is jarring, the interior is pretty basic, and climbing into the narrow cockpit is awkward because you have to swing your legs over a tall, wide sill. And loud battery-cooling fans emit a constant roar behind you. Tesla is developing its \$50,000-plus Model S sedan for release in 2012.

Because electric vehicles can be recharged with household outlets, are relatively energy efficient, and cut petroleum consumption, many experts feel that they represent the best short-term solution to the nation's energy challenge. Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of CONSUMER REPORTS, encourages the use of electric vehicles as a way to reduce the country's need for foreign oil and improve air quality.

In the end, whether an EV is right for you may simply come down to whether you feel the investment and lifestyle adjustment are worth helping the nation move a little closer to energy independence.

My year of driving electric

What's it like to live with an electric car every day? Recently I got some firsthand experience by leasing a Mini E—an electric-powered, two-seat Mini Cooper—for a year. The lease, \$850 a month, was part of a pilot program that Mini offered to 450 people in the Los Angeles and New York City areas.

The numbers looked right. My round-trip commute is 64 miles, and the Mini E provides a 100-mile range when it's fully charged. But at first, I could only drive the car to work every other day because the standard 110-volt electrical outlet in my garage wasn't able to fully charge the car in one night.

As part of the lease deal, Mini was supposed to install a high-output 220-volt charger (which can cost \$1,000 or more).

But the chargers were in short supply and I had to wait for an appointment to have one hooked up. Once the equipment was installed, the Mini's charging time was reduced to about 4 hours, making it easy to top off overnight and drive every day.

Initially, being limited to 100 miles of driving per day took a bit of getting used to. It was critical that I planned each side trip carefully so that I didn't end up stranded somewhere. But after a while,

when I really understood the distances to my common destinations—work, the supermarket, and so on—I became more comfortable with how far I could drive between charges.

I also got used to the tangible benefits of going electric. I appreciated the car's quiet operation and lack of tailpipe emissions. The fact that the car wasn't adding to New York's noise and pollution made me feel good. After having to fill up my '97 Honda CR-V every three or four days, I also delighted in never having to stop at a gas station or worry about oil changes. Plugging in the car overnight was much more convenient.

The Mini E increased my monthly electric bill by about \$60. In comparison, gasoline for a conventional Mini Cooper would have cost me about \$80 per month. And the extra cost of the electricity was well below the \$150 I was spending on gas for the CR-V in a typical month. That said, the SUV still came in handy when I needed more passenger or cargo space or had to drive longer distances.

Bottom line. After driving more than 11,000 miles on electricity, would I get another electric vehicle? The fact that I placed a deposit on the forthcoming Nissan Leaf probably answers that question.



MINI & ME Paul Eng, a senior Web editor who covers electronics, and his all-electric Mini E.

New for 2011

A sneak peek at 15 buzzworthy models coming down the road

GIVEN THE LINGERING TRAUMA of \$5-per-gallon gas prices a few years ago and the higher fuel-economy standards set by the federal government, automakers have made small cars a priority. An array of new compact and subcompact models is due soon, including the redesigned Ford Focus and the tiny Scion iQ, a competitor of the Smart ForTwo.

Add seven new hybrid models and the first wave of plug-in electric cars (see "Should You Plug In?" on page 48) and it's clear that fuel economy is one of the driving forces in today's auto market.

We're also seeing an increased focus on fuel efficiency in larger models, including the redesigned Ford Explorer SUV and the Honda Odyssey minivan.

Here's a look at some of the notable new models that have recently hit showrooms or will arrive in the coming months. We've included actual or predicted fuel economy figures where available. We'll fully test the vehicles as soon as we can buy them. In the meantime, check the Consumer Reports Cars blog (blogs.ConsumerReports.org/cars) for updates.

▶ Chevrolet Cruze • fall 2010

The compact Cruze is headed to the U.S. after making its debut in Europe and Asia. Buyers can choose from three trim lines and two four-cylinder engines, including a new 1.4-liter turbocharged version that Chevrolet says will achieve as much as 40 mpg on the highway with a manual transmission. Either engine is available with a six-speed automatic or manual transmission. Ten standard air bags, electronic stability control with rollover sensing, and OnStar are among the safety features. The Cruze will be priced between \$17,000 and \$23,000.

Bottom line. We've had a chance to drive early prototypes of the Cruze, and it looks like a great leap over the mediocre Cobalt. The Cruze is much quieter and has a more spacious and refined interior.



▶ Nissan Juke • fall 2010

Aimed at young buyers, the Nissan Juke is a sporty crossover based on the Versa hatchback and is meant to combine attributes of a small car and an SUV. The U.S. version has a direct-injection, turbocharged, 1.6-liter four-cylinder engine that will deliver 180 hp. It is matched with either a continuously variable automatic transmission or six-speed manual. Front- or all-wheel drive will be available. Pricing is expected to start at less than \$20,000. Standard features include six air bags, antilock brakes, and ESC. Optional features include leather seats, push-button start, navigation system, and power sunroof.

Bottom line. The Versa did well in our testing, which gives the Juke a good starting point. Although the Juke is big on style, the interior is snug, especially the backseat.

▶ Ford Focus • early 2011

The next-generation Focus will be available as a four-door sedan or hatchback and will be based on a platform used for 10 models around the world. Here it gets a direct-injection, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine mated to a six-speed automatic transmission. New available features include push-button start, a rearview camera, a semiautomatic parallel-parking system, and a new version of Ford's Sync infotainment system. Pricing will start at about \$17,000. An electric-powered model will arrive later in 2011.

Bottom line. Once one of our top-rated small cars, the Focus hasn't kept up with its competition after more than a decade without a complete redesign. Our initial impressions after driving early versions of the new model indicate that it could be a big improvement.



▶ Fiat 500 • early 2011

Chrysler's new parent, Fiat, returns to the U.S. for the first time since the early 1980s with the tiny 500, a two-door hatchback with seating for four. Sized between a Smart ForTwo and a Mini Cooper, the 500 will be offered first with a 100-hp, 1.4-liter four-cylinder engine matched with a six-speed manual transmission. A sportier, turbocharged Abarth model is expected to follow, along with a semiconvertible with a roll-up canvas top. An electric version will arrive in 2012. Prices have not been announced, but the 500 starts around \$14,000 in Europe.

Bottom line. We found a European version of the 500 fun to drive, but the ride was rather harsh. The interior is small but has a chic, retro European look.



▲ **Scion iQ** • early 2011

Designed for city dwellers who want something easy to park and fuel efficient, the iQ is a tiny two-door barely larger than a Smart ForTwo. The cabin seats four. The rear seat is tiny, but the front is roomy. Space-saving features include a compact air-conditioning system, electronic steering, and slender seatbacks. The engine is a 1.3-liter four-cylinder matched with a continuously variable transmission. Scion claims fuel economy will be in the high-30-mpg range. ESC and 10 air bags are standard, including an industry-first rear-window curtain bag. We expect the iQ to be priced starting at \$15,000.

Bottom line. Our initial impressions of the iQ indicate that it's a better execution of a micro car than the Smart ForTwo, which didn't fare well in our tests or with consumers.

▼ **Ford Fiesta** • available now

Designed by Ford of Europe, this subcompact is about the size of a Honda Fit and available as a four-door hatchback or sedan. The 1.6-liter four-cylinder engine is certified by the Environmental Protection Agency for 38 mpg on the highway and 29 mpg in the city. A manual transmission is standard; a new six-speed automated manual is optional. The interior has an upscale look and feel and seating for five. High-end models have a leather interior. Safety features include front, side, and curtain air bags as well as a driver's knee bag. ESC is standard, and prices start around \$14,000, including destination charges.

Bottom line. Our early impressions of the Fiesta are that it's agile with good steering and ride control, and its interior quality is notable for the class, but it can get pricey.



▶ **Mazda2** • available now

This subcompact provides seating for five and is available only as a four-door hatchback. It's already a hit in Europe, and the version sold here has a 100-hp, 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine paired with a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic transmission. Mazda claims the 2 will get up to 35 mpg on the highway. Two trim levels are offered. Standard safety features include ESC and curtain air bags. Prices start at \$14,730, including destination charges.

Bottom line. While the Mazda2 is closely related to the Ford Fiesta, it is roomier in the rear, less plush inside, and the more affordable of the two cars. Early impressions indicate that the Mazda2 is nimble and is a nice-driving car all around.

▼ **Mini Countryman** • February 2011

The largest Mini yet has four doors, roomier rear bucket seats, available all-wheel drive, and the look of an SUV. The cargo area has generous underfloor storage, folding rear seatbacks, and a pass-through. Powertrain choices include the 1.6-liter naturally aspirated or turbocharged four-cylinder engines found in other Minis, matched with a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission. Both engines get a slight horsepower increase for 2011. The Countryman is expected to sell for about \$30,000.

Bottom line. With extra room and AWD, the Countryman will be more practical and versatile than other Minis, but it seats only four. We hope it won't lose the agility and sportiness that make Minis fun to drive.



New hybrids, from sporty to luxurious

Of several new hybrid models, the Honda CR-Z and Lexus CT 200h are the only dedicated hybrids, with no conventional counterparts.

The CR-Z, now on sale, is a small two-seater for buyers who want sporty looks with their fuel economy. But an early drive shows that it's not that sporty to drive or very fuel efficient for a hybrid. Pricing starts at \$19,200.

The 200h, expected in early 2011, is a premium compact hatchback that's about the size of an Audi A3. Its hybrid powertrain is similar to the Prius', but it's based on a Toyota Corolla version sold in other countries. Pricing is expected to start around \$30,000.

Other hybrids on the horizon include:

Model	On sale
Hyundai Sonata	late 2010
Kia Optima	early 2011
Lincoln MKZ	fall 2010
Porsche Cayenne	fall 2010
Volkswagen Jetta	late 2011
Volkswagen Touareg	early 2011



Lexus 200h



Honda CR-Z



▶ **Honda Odyssey** • fall 2010

Honda says its redesigned minivan has more interior room and better aerodynamics and rear visibility and gets up to 28 mpg on the highway. The engine is the same 3.5-liter V6. We're told there are no plans for an all-wheel-drive version, so the Toyota Sienna is the only minivan offering AWD. Pricing will start around \$27,000.

Bottom line. Despite the new look, we don't expect this redesign to stray far from Honda's successful formula. And that's a good thing. The claim of improved fuel economy is probably helped by a new six-speed automatic. We'll see whether it improves on the 19 mpg overall that we got with our last Odyssey.

▶ **Kia Optima** • fall 2010

This mid-sized sedan has been redesigned with a wider, lower stance; a 3-inch-longer wheelbase; and a more spacious cabin. The new 2.4-liter, four-cylinder engine is good for 200 hp, and the optional V6 has been replaced with a turbocharged, 274-hp version of the four-cylinder. A hybrid model will arrive early next year. The Optima is expected to be priced in the low-\$20,000 range.

Bottom line. Our first impression is that the Optima drives much like the highly rated Hyundai Sonata, which shares its platform and got an impressive 27 mpg overall in our tests. The interior is roomy and nicely finished.



▶ **Volkswagen Jetta** • October 2010

The redesigned Jetta sedan, measuring 3.5 inches longer overall, has more rear leg room and a lower base price of about \$16,000. Gasoline and diesel engines are carried over, and a hybrid version is coming. Most versions will have the 2.5-liter, five-cylinder that got 24 mpg overall in our Golf. The Jetta wagon is unchanged; Volkswagen says it will retain the sporty demeanor and upscale interior.

Bottom line. The Jetta is now a distinct model, rather than simply a Golf with a trunk grafted on. The added space could make it a more appealing choice for families, especially if recent improvements in reliability continue.



▶ **Kia Sportage** • available now

This small SUV has grown longer, lower, and wider. Kia claims its 176-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine will deliver more power and better fuel economy than the outgoing V6. We got 22 mpg overall with the similar Hyundai Tucson. A more powerful turbocharged version will arrive later. The engine is mated with a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission. Curtain air bags and electronic stability control are standard. Pricing starts at about \$19,000.

Bottom line. The new Sportage looks sportier than its predecessor. But rear visibility is even worse than in the similar Hyundai Tucson.

▶ **Ford Explorer** • early 2011

The Explorer has shed its trucklike, body-on-frame platform for a carlike unibody design shared with the Taurus and Flex. It will seat up to seven in three rows of seats. Ford promises much better fuel economy, thanks to improved aerodynamics, reduced weight, a six-speed automatic transmission, and the turbocharged, direct-injection EcoBoost engine that's optional on front-wheel-drive versions. Safety features include available rear inflatable safety belts claimed to provide better protection for children. The base price is about \$29,000.

Bottom line. The use of a turbocharged four-cylinder engine in an SUV of this size is a first. Ford claims the EcoBoost engine will deliver the power of a V6 and the fuel economy of a four-cylinder. We'll see when we test it.

2011 cheat sheet

Check here to see what's new, redesigned, and discontinued for the 2011 model year.

New	On sale
BMW X1	early 2011
BMW X3	late 2010
Buick Regal	now
Chevrolet Cruze	fall 2010
Chevrolet Spark	2011
Chevrolet Volt	late 2010
Fiat 500	late 2010
Ford Fiesta	now
Honda CR-Z	now
Hyundai Equus	fall 2010
Lexus CT 200h	early 2011
Mazda2	now
Mini Countryman	February 2011
Mitsubishi Outlander Sport	fall 2010
Nissan Juke	fall 2010
Nissan Leaf	late 2010
Scion iQ	early 2011
Redesigned	On sale
Audi A8	late 2010
BMW 5 Series	now
Chevrolet Aveo	late 2011
Chrysler 300	early 2011
Dodge Charger	early 2011
Dodge Durango replacement	early 2011
Ford Explorer	early 2011
Ford Focus	early 2011
Honda Odyssey	fall 2010
Hyundai Elantra	late 2010
Infiniti QX56	now
Jeep Grand Cherokee	now
Kia Optima	fall 2010
Kia Sportage	now
Mercedes-Benz R-Class	now
Nissan Quest	early 2011
Saab 9-5	now
Scion tC	early 2011
Volkswagen Jetta	fall 2010
Volkswagen Touareg	early 2010
Volvo S60	fall 2010
Discontinued	
BMW 6 Series	
Dodge Viper	
Chevrolet Cobalt	
Chrysler PT Cruiser	
Ford Explorer Sport Trac	
Jeep Commander	
All Mercury models	

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Face-off Mustang vs. Camaro

The V6 version of the Ford outperforms its Chevy counterpart

LAST YEAR, in our face-off of modern pony cars, we tested V8 versions of the freshened Ford Mustang and the reissued Chevrolet Camaro. Despite being an older design, the Mustang outscored the Camaro with a combination of strong acceleration and agile handling. It was also easier to live with.

But what happens when you opt for the V6 engine in those cars? You would expect better fuel economy, but would the lower performance dilute the fun factor?

The answer is no for the Mustang but yes for the Camaro. The Ford's new V6 engine is not only more refined than the Camaro's, it delivered stronger acceleration and better fuel economy. The Mustang, which has a new gearbox and different steering for 2011, is the more agile and enjoyable car to drive of the two.

The Camaro provides decent acceleration, but it's not as readily available. The car rides well enough but it's almost 300 pounds heavier than the Mustang. Handling is considerably less agile, and the powertrain is rather lackluster. As we found in the V8 Camaro, the snug cabin has a closed-in feel and limited visibility.

Both cars have softer, more compliant suspension tuning than their V8 versions. That might not appeal to performance-oriented drivers, but it makes the cars more comfortable to drive on a day-to-day basis.

The V6 models are priced about \$8,000 less than the V8s we tested; our Mustang Premium retails at \$28,680 and our Camaro 2 LT at \$28,195.

Only the Ford is recommended. The Mustang has an excellent reliability record with the old V6; we expect this one to

be similar. The Camaro is too new for us to have reliability data.

Ride, handling, and drivetrain

At first glance, the V6 engines in our test cars seem very similar. The Mustang has a 305-hp, 3.7-liter engine, and the Camaro is powered by a 304-hp, 3.6-liter unit (the 2011 model has 312 hp). Both are quick, but the Mustang provides stronger acceleration and a smoother, more refined sound as well as a sharper throttle response at low to mid revs. Its 24 mpg overall is also notably better than the Camaro's 21 mpg. We opted for a six-speed manual transmission in our test cars, though you can get both cars with a six-speed automatic. The Mustang has a crisper, more precise shifter.

The Ford corners well, with good steering and little body lean. In contrast, the



Recommended

Ford Mustang

Highs Handling, acceleration, fuel economy

Lows Rear seat, trunk opening

Trim line V6 Premium

Drivetrain 305-hp, 3.7-liter V6; six-speed manual transmission; rear-wheel drive

Major options V6 Pony package (stripes, auto-dim headlights, fog lights, trunk spoiler, 18-inch wheels), red candy paint, heated front seats, power passenger seat

Tested price \$28,680



THE MUSTANG LINE **Body styles** Coupe, convertible **Drive wheels** Rear **Trims** Base, V6 Premium, GT, GT Premium, Shelby GT500 **Engines & transmissions** 3.7-liter V6 (305 hp); 5.0-liter V8 (402 hp); 5.4-liter V8 supercharged (540 hp); 6-speed manual; 6-speed automatic. **Base price range** \$22,145-\$53,645



SMOOTH The 305-hp V6 is more potent and polished than the one it replaces.

MORE TEST FINDINGS

Braking Very good overall.

Headlights Good, but low beams lack intensity. High beams not as bright as most.

Access Front is OK, despite low roof. Rear access is difficult.

Visibility Good to front and sides. Thick center pillars impeded the view some.

Cabin storage Modest, with few storage nooks.

Head restraints Rear ones need to be in upper position to provide sufficient protection. They fold when not in use for visibility.

Child seats It might be difficult to install rear-facing infant seats securely using safety belts. LATCH installation is better.

Camaro feels relatively ungainly, with slower steering response and more lean. The Mustang felt more controlled and balanced at the track, but some steering feedback was lost compared with recent pre-2011 versions. Its 55 mph speed through our avoidance maneuver topped the Camaro's by 2 mph. Both cars have standard electronic stability control.

Each car has a taut ride that is firm but not uncomfortable. Their suspensions absorb bumps well, but there is a bit more jiggle in the Mustang. Although both cars are generally quiet during highway driving, we did experience some wind noise. We noticed more road noise in the Camaro.

Inside the cabin

The interiors are a mix of higher-quality, soft-touch materials and some hard plastics and poor panel fits in spots. Both have well finished leather seats, but the Camaro's thick-rimmed, leather-covered steering wheel is nicer.

Front leg and head room are ample in both, but it's best to avoid the Camaro's optional sunroof, which steals head room.

The Camaro has a tilt-and-telescope steering wheel, but shorter drivers found it a stretch to the clutch pedal. The Mustang has a tilt-only wheel, but most drivers found a comfortable driving position.

Some drivers said the Mustang's console intrudes on knee room. Neither car has height-adjustable shoulder safety belts, which can cause them to rub and tug against shoulders. Both have comfortable front seats that offer a wide range of adjustments. The Mustang has better side bolstering and cushion support, but its backrest recline is hard to fine-tune.

Visibility is better in the Mustang than in the Camaro, which feels cavelike, with a low seating position, higher window line, and smaller windows.

The rear seats in both cars are best left for small children or, better yet, cargo. Access is difficult, the cushions are low and short, and leg and head room are limited. Most adults won't fit, and the Camaro's front seat recliner lever is inconveniently located, further hurting rear access.

The Mustang's dashboard has a retro look, reminiscent of its 1960s forebears.



Most controls are simple to use; large knobs and buttons are within easy reach. But the black-on-white gauges can be difficult to read due to reflections. A modern touch is Ford's Sync system, which allows voice control of cell phones and music players and, like the Camaro's OnStar system, can call 911 in an emergency.

The Camaro's dashboard has stylized gauges and controls. As in the Mustang, reflections make the speedometer hard to read. The Camaro's console-mounted, retro-look gauges are low and difficult to see at a glance. Some climate and radio controls are small and hard to read.

Neither car has a particularly large trunk, and the openings are small. But folding the rear seatbacks can expand them. The Mustang's seatbacks are split 50/50 and have releases at the outer edges. The Camaro's less-versatile one-piece seatback has a release at the top center, which makes it hard to reach.

NEXT MONTH We test coupe and convertible versions of the V8 Mustang.

Chevrolet Camaro

-  **Highs** Styling, straight-line acceleration
-  **Lows** Agility, shifter, visibility, controls, trunk

Trim line 2LT

Drivetrain 304-hp, 3.6-liter V6; six-speed manual transmission; rear-wheel drive

Major options Black stripes

Tested price \$28,195



THE CAMARO LINE **Body style** Coupe
Drive wheels Rear **Trim lines** LS, 1LT, 2LT, 1SS, 2SS **Engines & transmissions** 3.6-liter V6 (304 hp); 6.2-liter V8 (400 hp); 6.2-liter V8 (426 hp); 6-speed manual; 6-speed automatic. **Base price range** \$22,680-\$34,295



MEASURED Console gauges pay homage to the early Camaro but are hard to see.

MORE TEST FINDINGS

Braking Very good overall.

Headlights Very good distance from low beams but lacking in intensity. Slightly better distance and intensity from high beams.

Access Low roof requires ducking, but access is adequate in front. Rear access is difficult.

Visibility Poor, with thick pillars and small windows.

Cabin storage Modest.

Head restraints Front restraints are tall enough to provide protection even in lowest position. Rear seats lack head restraints.

Child seats Rear-facing seats might be difficult to secure using safety belts. LATCH anchors are easily accessed and should provide a secure fit.

Mustang V6: Showing up the Boss



The current Mustang's V6 engine is about 100 horsepower short of its V8 version (305 compared with 402). But thanks to modern technology, it delivers more power and quicker acceleration than many V8s in the much-heralded muscle-car era of the '60s and early '70s. Plus it provides far better fuel economy.

In 1970, for example, CONSUMER REPORTS tested a Mustang Boss 302, a high-performance model inspired by racing Mustangs of the era. When we compared that model with our 2011 V6 version, we found that the V6 posted a 0-to-60-mph acceleration time that's almost 2 seconds quicker and got more than twice as many miles per gallon. It's also a far better all-around car. The horsepower figures look close, but keep in mind that testing methods have changed, and today's horsepower figures are far more realistic.

	▲ 1970 Boss 302	2011 Mustang V6
Drivetrain	4.9-liter (302 cubic inch) V8, 4-speed manual transmission	3.7-liter (227 cubic inch) V6, 6-speed manual transmission
Horsepower*	290 (SAE gross)	305 (SAE net)
Vehicle weight	3,335 pounds	3,540 pounds
Acceleration, 0-60 mph	8.0 seconds	6.2 seconds
¼ mile, time	16.0 seconds	14.8 seconds
¼-mile speed	93 mph	98 mph
Overall fuel economy	11 mpg	24 mpg
Braking, 60-0 mph	130 ft.	134 ft.

*Horsepower figures based on testing standards established by the Society of Automotive Engineers.

✓ Recommended

These vehicles scored well in our testing, had average or better reliability in our subscriber survey, and performed at least adequately if included in government or insurance-industry safety tests. The Safety column in the Ratings chart reflects a vehicle's overall crash-protection and accident-avoidance capabilities.

Best for all-around performance:

- 2 Subaru Impreza WRX STi
- 6 Ford Mustang

A good balance of performance and fuel economy:

- 8 Ford Mustang

Best for fun, versatility, and affordability:

- 4 Volkswagen GTI

Used-car alternatives

Buying used can save you money or let you move up to a more upscale model. These have proved reliable and have scored well in our testing.

Model	Current value
2008 BMW 328i Coupe	\$24,425
2008 Nissan 350Z Coupe	19,925
2009 Infiniti G37 Coupe	31,725

Videos of recently tested vehicles are available free at www.ConsumerReports.org. Click on Videos on the home page.

Ratings Sporty cars

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommended Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Safety	Overall mpg
				0 100			
				P F G V E			

SPORTS CARS OVER \$25,000 Equipped with manual transmission.

1	BMW 135i	\$37,650		97	●	-	23
✓ 2	Subaru Impreza WRX STi	37,640		89	○	-	21
3	Mazda RX-8	31,305		86	NA	-	18
✓ 4	Volkswagen GTI (4-door)	27,504		85	○	-	27
5	Subaru Impreza WRX	26,088		84	●	-	24
✓ 6	Ford Mustang GT Premium 5.0 (V8)	36,310		83	○	●	22
7	Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution GSR	38,078		83	NA	-	21
✓ 8	Ford Mustang Premium (V6)	28,680	●	76	●	●	24
9	Chevrolet Camaro 2SS (V8)	35,425		71	new	-	18
10	Hyundai Genesis Coupe Grand Touring (V6)	28,375		70	new	-	23
11	Chevrolet Camaro 2LT (V6)	28,195	●	60	new	-	21
12	Dodge Challenger R/T (V8)	36,600		53	○	-	18

Why some vehicles aren't recommended

The Chevrolet Camaro SS, Hyundai Genesis Coupe, and Chevrolet Camaro V6 are too new to have reliability data. We have insufficient reliability data for the Mazda RX-8 and Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution GSR. The BMW 135i and Subaru Impreza WRX have below-average reliability. The Dodge Challenger scored too low in our testing to be recommended.

Auto Test Extra Kia Forte Koup

The coupe version of Kia's small Forte sedan is a stylish, fuel-efficient, and affordable alternative to cars like the Honda Civic Coupe and Scion tC. It accelerates quickly, corners crisply, and brakes well, although it's not up to the performance standards of more dedicated sports cars. Other pluses include a roomy, well-equipped cabin; easy-to-use controls; standard electronic stability control; and, as with all Kias, a 5-year bumper-to-bumper warranty. But most drivers will find the ride stiff, the manual shifter vague, and the clutch travel too long. In our Ratings, the Forte Koup virtually ties the Civic Si in overall test score and gets the same gas mileage—27 mpg overall—but retails for about \$2,000 less. The Koup isn't recommended because the car is too new for us to have reliability data.

On the road

Low body lean and quick, responsive steering make the Koup nimble. But it doesn't have the finesse of the Mazda3 or Civic because the steering lacks on-center feedback. At the Koup's handling limits, its tires provided tenacious grip but didn't allow much midcorner adjusting of the line. The well-calibrated standard ESC helped the car post a commendable speed in our avoidance maneuver. The firm suspension keeps body lean in check but creates a stiff, jiggly ride. Road noise is pronounced, and the engine tends to buzz a bit.

Power from the 173-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine was fine for normal driving but had little in reserve for quick bursts of acceleration for passing. The six-speed manual transmission mars the driving experience with its loose and disconnected feel, and the clutch pedal's high engagement point makes it easy to stall the car.

Roomy for a small coupe

The interior is quite spacious for this class, with trim and panels that fit together well. The leather seats look nice, but the grain on the cheaper trim pieces isn't consistent.

Front seats are well-shaped and comfortable, with good knee and leg room. A tilt-and-telescope steering wheel makes it easy to find a comfortable driving position. But tall people wanted more head room, even with the seat fully lowered. Despite the wide rear roof pillar, the rear view is acceptable.

Rear seats are typical of a sporty coupe, awkward to access and best used by adults only on short trips.

The displays are easy to read, and controls are straightforward and simple to use and feature USB and auxiliary ports and Bluetooth connectivity. An illuminated ring around the door speakers pulses in time to the audio but can be turned off if that's not your thing. Folding the 60/40-split rear seatbacks improves the modest cargo space.

Tested vehicle

▲ Highs Braking, handling, fuel economy, controls

▼ Lows Ride, noise, head room, shifter, clutch travel

Trim line SX

Drivetrain 173-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine; 6-speed manual transmission; front-wheel drive

Major options Leather upholstery, heated front seats, sunroof

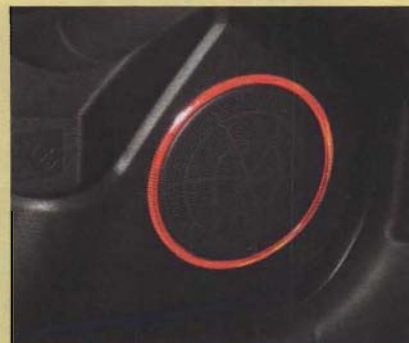
Tested price \$20,240



THE FORTE LINE Body styles Coupe, sedan Drive wheels Front Trim lines LX, EX, SX Engines & transmissions 2.0-liter 4 (156 hp); 2.4-liter 4 (173 hp); 5-speed manual; 6-speed manual; 4-speed automatic; 5-speed automatic. Base price range \$13,695-\$17,695



CLEAN Most interior panels fit together well, and the Kia's controls are user friendly.



RED LINE The Koup's speakers glow to the beat, but you can turn off that feature.

MORE TEST FINDINGS

Braking Excellent.

Headlights Both low and high beams performed well.

Access Requires some ducking, typical of a small two-door.

Visibility Good to front and sides, moderately impeded to the rear.

Cabin storage Moderate, with a deep console bin and large glove box.

Head restraints The center rear lacks a restraint, and the seatback is too low to provide adequate protection.

Child seats Some child seats might be tough to secure using the belts alone, but the lower LATCH anchors should work well. Rear-facing seats might require the front seat to be moved far forward.

▶ See specifications and Ratings for the Kia Forte Koup on page 63.

Face-off Buick LaCrosse vs. Regal

Choose your style: American cruiser or Euro sport sedan

AS ONE OF four brands that survived GM's bankruptcy last year, Buick is now undergoing its own metamorphosis. Long identified with large, cushy, but humdrum and ungainly cars, Buick is fighting to modernize its image in an era when drivers are looking for more responsive cars and better fuel economy. Two examples of that are the new Regal and redesigned LaCrosse sedans. Both are based on the same platform, share the same four-cylinder engine, and retail for \$28,000 to \$29,000. But they have distinctly different driving characters.

The Regal is a European import with the type of agile handling, taut suspension, and solid feel that reminds us more of an Acura TSX or Audi A4 than, say, a

Roadmaster. It's essentially a rebadged Opel Insignia, from GM's German subsidiary, that was intended to be the new Saturn Aura. When Saturn was discontinued, Buick adopted the car, resurrected a name that had been retired in 2004, and is using the Regal to test the waters in a category where no Buick has gone before.

The LaCrosse is a larger but thoroughly modern cruiser with the roomy, quiet interior; comfortable ride; and low-effort steering that has appealed more to traditional Buick drivers. Earlier this year, we tested a 2010 LaCrosse CXS with a V6 engine (see the January 2010 issue). For this issue, we tested the less expensive four-cylinder CX model, which delivers 3 mpg better fuel economy but is notably slower and less quiet.

Because of the cars' different personalities, we've listed them in Ratings categories that best reflect their direct competitors (see page 62). Although both cars achieved very good overall test scores, they still fall short of the best in these highly competitive classes. And both models are too new for us to have reliability data, so neither is recommended.

Handling, ride, and drivetrain

Our LaCrosse and Regal are each powered by a 182-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine that provides adequate but not outstanding performance. The Regal is slightly quicker. But in the larger LaCrosse the engine has to work hard at times, especially when merging onto a highway or maintaining speed on hills. Each engine is



GETTING TIGHT The rear seat is cramped but can fit two adults.

MORE TEST FINDINGS

Braking Very good overall.

Headlights Good overall, but halogen high beams are only slightly more intense than low beams.

Access A low roofline and wide doorsills slightly impede access.

Cabin storage Limited.

Head restraints Center rear lacks a head restraint and the seatback is too low to protect adults in a rear collision.

Child seats Securing child seats in the rear might be difficult with the safety belts. Using LATCH anchors is easier.

Buick Regal

▲ Highs Agility, ride, transmission, fit and finish, trunk

▼ Lows Rear seat, acceleration

Trim line CXL

Drivetrain 182-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

Major options Power passenger seat, park assist, sunroof

Tested price \$28,840



THE REGAL LINE **Body style** Sedan **Drive wheels** Front **Trim line** CXL **Engines & transmission** 2.4-liter 4 (182 hp); 2.0-liter 4 turbo (220 hp); 6-speed automatic. **Base price** \$26,245

mated with a six-speed automatic transmission that shifts smoothly. Both cars got 23 mpg overall on regular fuel, which is not that impressive for the smaller Regal but decent for the LaCrosse. The Regal will get an optional 220-hp, 2.0-liter turbo-charged four later this year.

It's in the areas of ride and handling that the cars differ most. The LaCrosse has a cushy ride that's comfortable on a variety of roads. The very smooth highway ride is almost as good as in some full-sized luxury cars. The 17-inch wheels and tires on our four-cylinder CX (which have taller sidewalls than the CXS' 19-inchers) contribute both to the absorbent ride and to a quiet cabin. The LaCrosse handles responsively and is more agile than past Buicks (although that's not hard to be). But the steering is light, especially at low speeds, and some testers wished for more on-center feel. Although the LaCrosse is large and has soft suspension tuning, it was balanced and secure when pushed to its handling limits.

The Regal, on the other hand, has a taut, well-controlled ride and handles like

a sports sedan. The suspension provides good isolation, and the car is solid and compliant on the highway. Although the Regal is impressively quiet at highway speeds, engine noise can be pronounced when accelerating. The car is agile and responsive in corners and enjoyable to drive. The steering is prompt and provides good feedback and on-center feel, but some drivers found it overly heavy at low speeds and when parking. The car is stable and predictable at its handling limits. Both cars posted commendable speeds through our avoidance maneuver.

Inside the cabin

The LaCrosse is 7 inches longer and slightly taller than the Regal, which translates into more interior room, especially in the rear seat. The LaCrosse's rear seat is roomy and very comfortable for two, with plenty of leg room; the Regal's is a bit cramped, with firm seats and limited head room.

Neither car's front seats measure up to those in the LaCrosse CXS we previously tested. The cloth seats in the LaCrosse CX were squishy, with uneven support. The

Regal's are firm—some testers found them hard—although with good cushion support. We also found the bottom cushions on both cars too short. If you buy the LaCrosse, we suggest you ante up for the more supportive leather seats.

Both cars have nicely finished interiors overall, although with minor trim imperfections. The smaller Regal actually provides a roomier driving position. In the LaCrosse, a wide center console and door panels impinged on the leg room for some drivers. Both cars have tilt-and-telescope steering wheels to help drivers find a comfortable position.

Driver visibility in the Regal is limited, although far better than in the LaCrosse, where thick front roof pillars create big blind zones. In both cars, a high rear deck, combined with large rear head restraints and a fairly small rear window, limit the view rearward.

Most controls are easy to use, although the LaCrosse's center stack has a sea of buttons, and the Regal's audio buttons are spread over a large area. Both designs can make it tricky to find the right button

Buick LaCrosse

Highs Ride, quietness, fit and finish, crash-test results

Lows Visibility, acceleration, tight cockpit, front-seat support

Trim line CX

Drivetrain 182-hp, 2.4-liter four-cylinder; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

Major options Power front seats, automatic climate control, Bluetooth, remote start

Tested price \$27,895



THE LACROSSE LINE **Body style** Sedan
Drive wheels Front or AWD **Trim lines** CX, CXL, CXS **Engines & transmission** 2.4-liter 4 (182 hp); 3.6-liter V6 (280 hp); 6-speed automatic. **Base price range** \$26,495-\$33,265



BAD POSTURE The cloth seats lacked support; go with leather.

MORE TEST FINDINGS

Braking Very good overall.

Headlights Halogen low and high beams provide good illumination straight ahead and to the sides.

Access A low roofline and wide doorsills slightly impede access.

Cabin storage Modest.

Head restraints Center rear lacks a head restraint and seatback is too low for adults.

Child seats Securing child seats in the rear might be difficult with the safety belts. Using LATCH anchors is easier.

with a quick look. We also got some reflections off the gauges and found some hard to read at a glance.

The audio system in each car includes an auxiliary input and a USB port that let you plug in a portable music source and listen to it through the car's speakers. The Regal's system also lets you operate an iPod through the car's audio controls.

Even though it's smaller, the Regal has a little more trunk space, allowing us to fit in four large suitcases and a duffel bag. We packed three suitcases and two duffels in the LaCrosse. Either trunk can be expanded by folding one or both sections of the cars' 60/40-split rear seatbacks. There's a small pass-through in each so you can carry skis or other long items.

Overall, the LaCrosse is a natural and inviting evolution for the Buick marque. We liked the V6 CXS better, but choosing the four-cylinder CX and fewer options saves \$10,000. As for the Regal, we liked its driving dynamics and interior quality, and feel the car is well worth checking out. But the question surrounding the Regal is this: How many people looking for a sports sedan will consider a Buick?

Videos of recently tested vehicles are available free at www.ConsumerReports.org. Click on Videos on the home page.

Used-car alternatives

You can save money or get more car for your money by buying used. These cars scored well in our testing when new and have proven reliable.

For Buick Regal

Model	Current value
2009 Acura TSX	\$24,200
2009 Infiniti G37	25,850
2009 BMW 328i	27,225

For Buick LaCrosse

Model	Current value
2009 Hyundai Azera Limited	\$21,250
2009 Honda Accord EX 4-cyl.	20,425
2009 Lincoln MKZ	22,375
2008 Acura TL	24,725

Recommended

These vehicles scored well in our testing, had average or better reliability in our subscriber survey, and performed at least adequately if included in government or insurance-industry safety tests. The Safety column in the Ratings chart reflects a vehicle's overall crash-protection and accident-avoidance capabilities.

Best for fuel economy:

- A1 Acura TSX
- A2 Lexus HS
- A3 Volkswagen CC
- B6 Volkswagen Passat
- B10 Subaru Legacy

If roominess is important:

- B1 Hyundai Genesis
- B9 Nissan Maxima
- B14 Ford Taurus

Fun to drive:

- A1 Acura TSX
- A3 Volkswagen CC
- B6 Volkswagen Passat

Ratings Family sedans

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommended	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Safety	Overall mpg
					0			100
					P	F	G	V
								E

A COMPACT FAMILY SEDANS

✓	1	Acura TSX (4-cyl.)	\$29,675		84	●	●	25
✓	2	Lexus HS 250h Premium	38,939		83	○	●	31
✓	3	Volkswagen CC Luxury (4-cyl.)	32,680		82	●	●	24
	4	Suzuki Kizashi SE	22,489		82	new	●	25
	5	Buick Regal CXL (4-cyl.)	28,840	●	77	new	●	23
✓	6	Lincoln MKZ	37,160		77	●	●	20

B LARGE FAMILY SEDANS

✓	1	Hyundai Genesis 3.8	\$36,000		92	○	●	21
✓	2	Honda Accord EX-L (V6)	28,695		88	○	●	21
✓	3	Subaru Legacy 3.6R Limited	30,094		88	○	●	22
	4	Toyota Camry XLE (V6)	29,839		87	○	●	23
	5	Toyota Avalon XLS	34,974		87	○	●	24
✓	6	Volkswagen Passat 2.0T	27,440		87	○	●	24
✓	7	Acura TL (base)	35,715		85	○	●	23
	8	Toyota Camry LE (4-cyl.)	22,850		84	○	●	26
✓	9	Nissan Maxima 3.5 SV	33,700		83	○	●	22
✓	10	Subaru Legacy 2.5i Premium	23,830		83	○	●	25
✓	11	Hyundai Azera Limited	31,670		81	○	●	20
✓	12	Honda Accord LX-P (4-cyl.)	22,795		79	○	●	23
	13	Buick LaCrosse CXS (3.6)	37,555		74	new	●	20
✓	14	Ford Taurus Limited	34,980		73	○	●	19
	15	Buick LaCrosse CX (4-cyl.)	27,895	●	70	new	●	23

Why some vehicles aren't recommended

The Buick LaCrosse, Buick Regal, and Suzuki Kizashi are too new for us to have reliability data. We have temporarily suspended recommending the Toyota Avalon and Camry because of problems with sticking accelerator pedals.

Compare

Recommended



VERSION	Ford Mustang	Chevrolet Camaro	Kia Forte	Buick Regal	Buick LaCrosse
TRIM LINE	V6 Premium	2LT	SX	CXL	CX
PRICE: BASE/TESTED	\$25,845/\$28,680	\$26,875/\$28,195	\$17,695/\$20,240	\$26,245/\$28,840	\$26,245/\$27,895
DRIVETRAIN					
Engine	3.7-liter V6 (305 hp)	3.6-liter V6 (304 hp)	2.4-liter 4-cyl. (173 hp)	2.4-liter 4-cyl. (182 hp)	2.4-liter 4-cyl. (182 hp)
Transmission	6-speed manual	6-speed manual	6-speed manual	6-speed automatic	6-speed automatic
Drive wheels	Rear	Rear	Front	Front	Front
TIRES TESTED					
Model & size	Pirelli P Zero Nero A/S, size P235/50ZR18 97W	Pirelli P Zero Nero A/S, size P245/50ZR19 104W	Goodyear Eagle LS2, size P215/45R17 87H	Michelin Pilot HX MXM4, size P235/50R18 97V	Michelin Primacy MXM4, size P245/50R17 98H
RATINGS					
PERFORMANCE					
Acceleration	+	-	-	○	○
0 to 60 mph, sec.	6.2	6.6	7.6	9.9	10.2
45 to 65 mph, sec.	4.5	4.6	5.5	7.2	7.4
Quarter-mile, sec.	14.8	15.2	16.0	17.5	17.7
Transmission	+	○	○	+	+
Routine handling	-	-	-	-	-
Emergency handling	-	-	-	-	○
Avoid. maneuver, max. spd., mph	55.0	53.0	55.0	53.5	52.5
Braking	-	-	-	-	-
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	134/143	133/144	128/136	131/145	132/145
Headlights	○	-	-	○	○
COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE					
Ride	○	○	○	-	+
Noise	-	-	○	-	-
Driving position	-	○	○	-	○
Front-seat comfort	-	-	-	-	-
Rear-seat comfort	●	●	●	○	○
Access	○	○	○	-	○
Controls and displays	-	○	-	-	-
Interior fit and finish	-	-	-	-	-
Trunk	●	●	●	○	○
PREDICTED RELIABILITY	+	New	New	New	New
FUEL					
Overall mpg	24	21	27	23	23
City/highway mpg	16/35	14/31	19/37	15/37	15/37
Type	regular	regular	regular	regular	regular
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, mi.	16.0/435	18.8/460	13.7/415	19.5/540	18.6/490
Annual cost, 12K mi. at \$2.80/gal.	\$1,395	\$1,600	\$1,235	\$1,440	\$1,435
SAFETY					
CRASH TESTS					
IIHS frontal offset	Good	NA	Good	NA	Good
IIHS side with/without side air bags	Acceptable/NA	NA/NA	NA	NA/NA	Good/NA
IIHS rear	Good	NA	NA	NA	Good
IIHS roof strength	NA	NA	NA	NA	Good
NHTSA front, driver/pass.	NA/NA	-/-	NA/NA	NA/NA	+/+
NHTSA side, driver/rear	NA/NA	+/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	+/+
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	NA/NA	+/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	+/+
AIR BAGS					
Side, front/rear	std./no	std./no	std./no	std./opt.	std./opt.
Head protection	no	standard	standard	std. w/rollover	std. w/rollover
ACTIVE SAFETY					
Antilock brakes	standard	standard	standard	standard	standard
Traction control	standard	standard	standard	standard	standard
Stability control	standard	standard	standard	standard	standard
SPECIFICATIONS					
DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT					
Length/width/height, in.	188/74/56	190/76/54	176/70/55	190/73/58	197/73/59
Wheelbase, in.	107	112	104	108	112
Turning circle, ft.	38	39	40	39	40
Ground clearance, in.	5.0	6.0	5.0	5.5	5.0
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	3,540 (54/46)	3,815 (52/48)	2,915 (63/37)	3,685 (58/42)	3,810 (58/42)
Maximum load, lb.	700	730	850	925	925
Luggage, suitcases, and duffels	2+2	2+1	2+2	4+1	3+2
Towing capacity, lb.	1,000	1,000	NR	NR	NR
INTERIOR ROOM					
Front shoulder room, in.	55.0	57.0	54.5	56.5	57.0
Front leg room, in.	39.5	40.0	39.5	43.0	43.0
Front head room*, in.	5.0	3.5	2.0	3.5	4.5
Rear shoulder room, in.	50.0	48.5	50.5	53.5	55.5
Rear leg room, in.	23.0	22.0	27.0	28.0	30.5
Rear head room*, in.	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	2.0

*Above a person 5'9" tall.

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We are especially interested in candidates for the board with expertise in consumer protection, health care, testing, engineering, and product design and evaluation. Those with experience in the development and application of ethical rules and conflict-of-interest principles are also encouraged to apply. Elections will be conducted through the Annual Ballot & Questionnaire in spring 2011. Send nominations, including self-nominations, with a résumé to Consumers Union, Box JBS, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057. Deadline for submissions is Oct. 1. We have at least three open slots and are looking for board members who are passionate about CU's mission and can commit to attending three two-day meetings per year. Board members are not paid but are reimbursed for travel expenses.

CU changes bylaws

CU's board of directors voted at its January 2010 meeting to approve amendments to certain provisions of CU's bylaws, including the indemnification provisions. To see a copy of the revised bylaws, see the "About Us" section of ConsumerReports.org at www.ConsumerReports.org/cro/aboutus/index.htm.

CU 'Labs on Tour'

Neal Myerberg, one of America's foremost authorities on tax- and financial-planning strategies using charitable techniques, will present "Protecting Yourself in a Bad Economy: Keeping up with the Costs of Retirement." Robert Karpel, senior CU engineer, will follow with "Labs on Tour," a look at CONSUMER REPORTS' testing program. Presentations are tentatively scheduled for Sept. 29 in Greenwich, Conn., and Oct. 20 in Arlington, Va. For information and to reserve a place, contact Judy Frank, at jfrank@consumer.org or at 914-378-2273.

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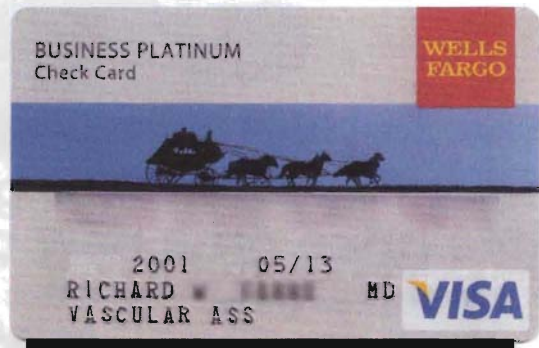
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Lern hear

From left, pitches from Start Smart Learning Center, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, and Happy Days Child Development Center, where someone seems to be challenged not only by spelling but also by math: The copy boasts a "very low teacher/child ratio."

Submissions: SellingIt@cro.consumer.org or Selling It, Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY10703