

CHOICE

Hunting season

Shopping the sales

202 *products* TESTED

- Ice cream makers
- Portable induction cooktops
- Garden shredders
- Grass edgers
- Ceiling fans
- Travel insurance
- Mince pies
- Freezers
- Fridges
- BBQs



STAR POWER

Don't fall for fake reviews

Sweet summer

Handy tips for holidays & home life

Here comes the sun

Get ready to make the most of it

Over the weekend, firmly entrenched underneath a ceiling fan as I slowly baked inside my living room, I asked myself the age old question: which is best, summer or winter?

As a pale, pasty Scotsman with borderline ginger hair, you'd think I'd hate summer with a passion, but the truth is I sort of love it. Despite being burned to a crisp more times than I care to count, I still love to slip slop slap and go for a swim at the beach, or cook up a ridiculous amount of snags on my barbecue with an ice-cold ginger beer glued to my hand.

Winter has its moments, but I think at the core of my being, I'm a summer guy.

But in Australia, summer is a season you have to prepare for. And, bushfire and backburning issues aside, it's a season you have to prepare your living space for. This month CHOICE is helping you do just that.

When my wife and I first moved into the home we're currently living in, she insisted on installing ceiling fans in every single major room. A decision I didn't understand until I saw our energy bill plummet.

One thing I've learned over the years: every minute you're using a fan instead of an air conditioner is a minute in which you're saving money on your energy bill. This month we reviewed a whole suite of ceiling fans and I highly recommend having a read. Now that I have ceiling fans in my house, I can't imagine living without them.

We also reviewed barbecues! Australia's love of a good barbie is up there with my absolute favourite parts of this sun-baked country. I plan to spend a decent amount of time armed with a baster and a set of tongs. If you're in a similar boat, you might want to take a gander over on page 63. We've got the best of this year's models for backyards and balconies alike – and you might just get a bargain on one of these in the holiday sales. If you're holding out for the very latest models on the market, we'll bring you those test results in the February issue.

Summer is not all sunshine and lollipops. As a dedicated hater of all things gardening, the exponential rate at which grass grows in the summer months drives me completely bonkers – mainly because when it comes to lawns I'm clueless. Thankfully, the



experts at CHOICE are markedly less clueless. I've learned a lot from reading our review of lawn edgers (page 66). Not enough that I'm now looking forward to maintaining my lawn, but perhaps enough to compete with my next door neighbour who, as far as I can tell, was a full-time greenkeeper in a past life.

Have a good one folks, and see you in February.

Mark Serrels
CHOICE Editorial Director
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CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Wherever possible, we pay full price for the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by membership. Memberships include online access and services such as CHOICE Help. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert

assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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MEMBERSHIPS/RENEWALS Call 1800 069 552 or email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.





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**SWEET
HOMEMADE
SCOOPS
P44**



CHOICE magazine provides a selection of our top product reviews. We can't always include all the models we've tested, but you'll always find the products that scored the best. To view complete results for all our tests, go to choice.com.au, or call Customer Service on 1800 069 552 to add full online access to your membership package.

CHECKOUT

The latest consumer news in brief
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New crypto rules on the horizon?

In October, the government announced it was getting serious about reining in the cryptocurrency sector. The government's proposal paper charts a course for making crypto exchanges and digital asset platforms abide by Australian financial services laws, and requiring platform operators to hold an Australian financial services licence. The paper also recommends that minimum standards be enforced for holding and transacting in tokens. These moves would amount to a sea change for an industry that's long been devoid of any such regulations.

In 2022, a CHOICE national survey revealed that more than half of us don't know whether cryptocurrency trading comes with consumer protections similar to those that apply to the stock market. About the same number of Australians said they thought such protections should be in place.

"Collapses of crypto platforms, both locally and globally, have seen Australians lose their assets or be forced to wait their turn amongst long lines of creditors," says Treasurer Jim Chalmers. "The proposed reforms seek to reduce the risk of these collapses happening by lifting the standard of the operation of platforms and increasing oversight."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Youpla support scheme extended, permanent resolution needed

The federal government has extended the temporary scheme to support members of the collapsed Youpla funeral fund. The scheme, which provides funeral funding support for former members of the funeral fund which went into administration last year, was due to expire in November, but will now be extended until 30 June 2024. First Nations consumer advocates welcomed the announcement as a way of relieving pressure on the looming deadline, but reiterated calls for an enduring permanent resolution that includes all victims of the financial collapse of Youpla and a culturally appropriate and fair resolution for those with claims against the company.

“We have cautious optimism about yesterday’s announcement from Ministers Linda Burney and Stephen Jones, with hopes that this will be the final extension before the federal government’s enduring resolution

is announced,” says Bettina Cooper, Boandik woman and Save Sorry Business Coalition Coordinator. “We have welcomed their commitment to put a scheme in place to address the harm to First Nations people caused by Youpla, Centrepay and regulatory failures over decades.”

JARNI BLAKKARLY



IMAGES: GETTY

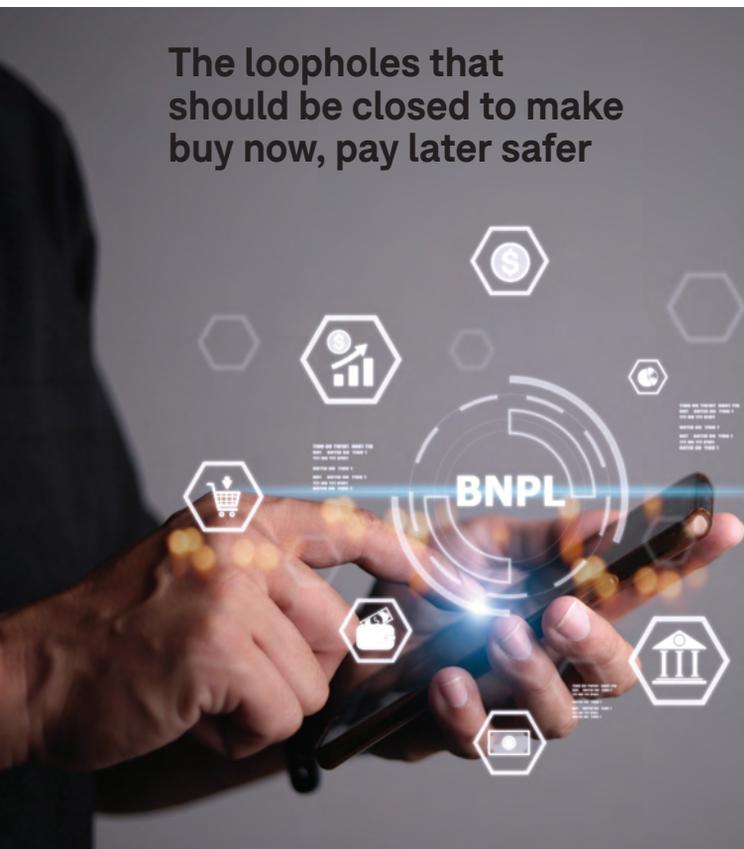
The loopholes that should be closed to make buy now, pay later safer

A national survey conducted by CHOICE earlier this year found nine in 10 people in Australia (88%) support closing legal loopholes to ensure buy now, pay later (BNPL) loans are regulated like credit cards. While the Australian government is considering how to regulate BNPL providers, consumer organisations and financial counsellors are calling on them to ensure any new legislation requires BNPL providers to verify people’s income and list basic liability information.

Verifying a person’s income before issuing them a loan is essential, as this information is required to assess whether repayments will be affordable. It is also essential that BNPL providers list basic credit liability information, which means they, and other lenders, will be able to see the full amount of all loans that a consumer has signed up for and is obliged to repay.

These two consumer protections are necessary to protect consumers. If BNPL providers continue to evade regulation, people will continue to fall into debt traps. If you’d like to receive regular updates on this campaign, head to [closeendingloopholes.org.au](https://www.closeendingloopholes.org.au).

YELENA NAM



More telcos accused of carrying scam texts

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has directed two more telcos to comply with anti-scam laws after it found they had failed to properly protect consumers and allowed criminals to send text messages impersonating major brands.

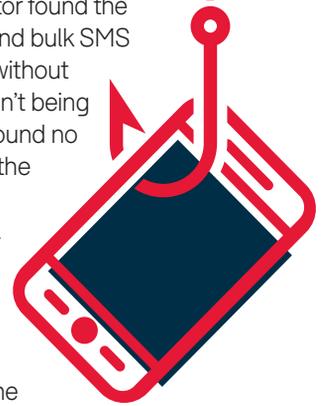
The communications watchdog issued the directions to Twilio Inc. and Vonage Business Inc., alleging the latter had allowed scammers impersonating the Commonwealth Bank, Apple Pay and Australia Post to send more than 3000 text messages through its system.

“We continue to find telcos allowing scammers to send SMS messages impersonating businesses,” says ACMA chair Nerida O’Loughlin. “We know these types of scams are hard for people to spot and can be particularly devastating for victims.”



Following an investigation, the regulator found the two companies had allowed users to send bulk SMS messages using particular sender IDs, without making sufficient checks that they weren’t being used to perpetrate scams. The ACMA found no evidence that scammers had exploited the vulnerabilities in Twilio’s systems, but its processes were still found to be lacking.

It comes after the watchdog issued similar warnings to four telcos over the past seven months for carrying impersonation texts. Telcos that don’t follow these directions to comply with the law can be hit with penalties of up to \$250,000.



LIAM KENNEDY

Ticketek spam tactics prove costly

In 2019, the ACMA issued a formal warning to Ticketek to cease and desist breaching the Spam Act. But it seems the market-dominating ticketing business didn’t take the warning to heart. In October this year, Ticketek paid a \$515,040 fine to the ACMA after the regulator found it had sent around 41,000 marketing texts and emails without the consent of recipients, and around 57,000 texts and emails to people who had previously unsubscribed.

Ticketek claimed that some of the emails were exempt from the Spam Act because they contained event information for ticket holders, but the ACMA’s investigation found they also contained advertising and promotional material for upcoming events, meaning the Spam Act applied.

“Australians are fed up with these types of intrusions on their privacy and Ticketek has no excuses given it was on notice after our previous action,” says the ACMA Chair Nerida O’Loughlin. “It is also incredibly frustrating for people to take the time to unsubscribe only for those requests to not be actioned. Businesses must have working systems in place to comply with consumer choice and consent.”

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Google Pixel 8

Google built its Pixel brand by producing a range of entry-level and quality mid-range phones for under \$1000. But the latest iteration, The Pixel 8, has crossed that threshold and doesn't offer enough to justify the price bump.

The thing is, it's still a good phone. General performance is great and the 6.2-inch, HDR-enabled AMOLED display is rich, crisp and bright. The form factor looks similar to past models as well.

Battery life is solid too. Regular use and interactions throughout the day will leave it with around a 30% charge by 5pm, but it can last as long as 14 hours if you're just streaming HD video, for example. Fast charge has been upgraded as well. A completely dead battery can get to 50% in 24 minutes and 100% in a little over 55 minutes using Google's 30W wall charger.

But because the last few Pixel generations have been able to handle just about any everyday task, there aren't many tangible improvements to most of these hardware upgrades. It feels a little too familiar.

In a win for consumers, the Pixel 8 (and 8 Pro) includes seven years of security and feature updates. This somewhat reduces the impact of forced redundancy, but smartphone hardware tends to degrade at a much faster rate than that, especially the battery life. So, while this is great on paper, it's not entirely practical.

Like various Pixels before it, the top-notch camera retains a nice natural, balanced look with just a bit of vibrancy and pop. That said, the image processor still tends to automatically over-sharpen shots, especially in bright environments.



GOOGLE PIXEL 8
PRICE \$1199 (128GB)
CONTACT store.google.com



**FIRST
LOOK**

Night Sight mode is just as impressive, delivering warmth and even lighting across high-contrast environments. Shadows hold onto dark gradients well, rather than turning into a black void. But the ultrawide lens creates blurry, smeared, foggy images in this mode and the wide aperture does leave the Pixel 8 prone to depth-of-field issues. With no manual override, there's no way to get around this problem.

New features include an excellent macro lens that was previously reserved for the Pixel Pro range, and a fancy artificial intelligence feature called Best Take. This lets you select faces from images shot in rapid succession into a single composite photo, so you don't get stuck with half open mouths or closed eyes. While this may be too much of a deepfake nightmare for some, Best Take works seamlessly.

Audio Magic Eraser is the most significant addition to video mode. It automatically identifies and removes speech, ambient or environmental background noise to remarkably good effect.

These are all impressive-looking updates on paper and, once again, it's important to stress that this is a great phone. But the Pixel 8 doesn't feel like much of a step above its predecessors during day-to-day use, simply because they were already so good. Combine that with a four-figure price tag and you're left with a solid performer that lacks the wow factor.

PETER ZALUZYNY



Best take feature

Our submission to the 2022 flood inquiry

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics is leading an inquiry investigating insurers' responses to the major floods that hit the east coast of Australia in 2022. The floods in South East Queensland and NSW had insurance costs of around \$5.87 billion, making them the costliest natural disaster event for insurance in Australian history.

CHOICE and the Financial Rights Legal Centre (FRLC) have written a joint submission to the government's inquiry, sharing the experiences of people affected by the floods and calling on the committee to consider a number of recommendations to improve the availability and accessibility of insurance going forward.

Our submission recommends that insurers be required to proactively warn consumers when they suspect they are underinsured and that insurance policies should include temporary accommodation for people who rent. Governments should work together to build a single source of information on risk to properties and allocate financial assistance for mitigation measures, as well as reward people who take steps to mitigate risks to their properties.

Governments also need to develop a plan for relocating communities at high risk. This should include funding for community engagement for conducting consultations about ways to mitigate future risk, including the possibility of relocation.

The committee's final report is expected in September 2024. Add your voice for fairer insurance: choice.com.au/climateinsurance.

BEA SHERWOOD



Over 25 advocates and experts call for urgent privacy reform

Human Rights Watch, the Alliance for Gambling Reform, and Professor Toby Walsh are among more than 25 organisations and advocates to sign CHOICE's open letter on privacy reform. This joint statement backs a number of changes to the Privacy Act now supported by the federal government. The proposed changes include an obligation on businesses to collect and use data fairly and reasonably, a more expansive definition of "personal information" and removing the small business exemption.

The open letter points to the harms of manipulative marketing practices, bias in artificial intelligence and the trade of personal data and scams. The signatories are calling on the federal government to urgently implement protections in 2024.

The government's next step will be to consult on the final wording on the proposed changes. Not all affected businesses will be happy and may gear up for a last-ditch effort to prevent critical reforms, but CHOICE will do its best to ensure that consumers are represented in this much-needed overhaul of the Privacy Act.

RAFI ALAM



Government approves new toy safety standard

Following consultations with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), the federal government has announced new safety standards for toys marketed at children under the age of three. Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones says an estimated 2500 children in this bracket present to hospital emergency departments every year because of injuries from unsuitable or dangerous toys.

The new standards seek to minimise choking and suffocation risks from toys, including rattles and teething toys, which are among the items most often recalled by the ACCC. The mandatory safety standard will ensure all toys adhere to strict design and testing requirements and do not contain small parts.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Tesla’s button battery failure

Three children have died so far in Australia after ingesting or inserting a button battery, and many more have been seriously injured. That’s why mandatory product safety and information standards came into effect in June 2022. These standards require manufacturers to secure battery compartments and to provide warnings and emergency advice. But compliance can be spotty.

As a case in point, Tesla Motors Australia recently paid penalties of \$155,460 after the ACCC hit the electric car maker with ten infringement notices for violating safety standards. Tesla failed to conduct button battery safety tests as required on three of its key fob models and two of its illuminated door sill models, and the company also failed to provide the mandatory safety warnings on these products.

“Button batteries can be lethal for young children, and the Australian mandatory standards are designed

to reduce the risk of injury through testing of the safety of products containing them before they are sold, and explicit warnings on the packaging of the products,” says ACCC deputy chair Catriona Lowe. “Any failure to test these products before they are sold poses an unacceptable risk to children.”

Tesla removed the products from sale following the ACCC investigation and started testing them. The Model 3/Y and Model X key fobs have since been found to comply. Testing for other affected Tesla products was continuing at the time of publication.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



IMAGES: GETTY/ TESLA

Victorians with dodgy cars are battling a broken system

Victorian car owners with faulty vehicles are facing a myriad of problems, from dealers refusing to honour consumer rights to an overly complex tribunal and complaints system. These are the findings of a new report by the Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC), which surveyed over 1000 Victorian car owners and conducted in-depth interviews with those who had tried to navigate the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) system for complaints.

“What we found was that a lot of people have a faulty car, it’s hard to get a fix and dealers aren’t working with people to get problems fixed early,” says CPRC CEO Erin Turner. “When you need to escalate a complaint, it’s really difficult, it’s long, it’s costly and therefore most people don’t get to a formal complaints process because it is too hard.”

The report, commissioned by the Consumer Action Law Centre, found that from the point of knowing about a fault with a car to getting a resolution at VCAT, the consumer had to go through at least 60 different steps. Many of these included long delays, documentation in overly legal language and assessments of the vehicle that cost the consumer thousands of dollars.

JARNI BLAKKARLY



Better consumer guarantees promised for Jeep buyers

The company distributing Jeep vehicles in Australia has promised to improve how it deals with customers experiencing problems with their cars and provide better

training to staff, following an ACCC investigation. Stellantis Australia says it will work to make sure deserving customers receive replacements, repairs or other remedies they’re entitled to under Australian Consumer Law, and that people buying vehicles and the staff selling them are better educated about these consumer guarantees. The company made the promise in a court-enforceable undertaking to the ACCC, which had investigated Stellantis after receiving numerous complaints from Jeep owners about failing vehicles and their struggles to get remedies for them.

“Consumers have rights [and] businesses should have appropriate systems in place to ensure they do not mislead consumers about these rights,” says ACCC deputy chair Mick Keogh. “[They] must comply with their obligations if customers experience problems with a product or service they have purchased.”

In addition to its promises to customers and staff, the company also says it will provide a written response to customers who seek a remedy and, if applicable, explain to them why a remedy has not been agreed to.

LIAM KENNEDY



Beware business practices that are unfair but not illegal

Do you think businesses are required by law to act fairly towards consumers? If you said yes, like 72% of those who took part in CHOICE's recent national survey, you may be surprised to learn that this isn't actually the case. Although the Australian Consumer Law (ACL) protects consumers against areas like misleading, deceptive and unconscionable conduct, it doesn't cover all conduct and practices that people in Australia find unfair.

CHOICE research shows that the ACL is increasingly out of step with community expectations. Among the business practices and conduct unlikely to be covered by the law that people in Australia found unfair are: charging you more for a product or service based on your personal information; forcing you to use a chatbot for customer service; making it hard to cancel a subscription; and selling extended warranties that don't cover you for anything in addition to what is available under the law.



The federal government is exploring options for what new fairness regulations could look like to help close the gaps in the law, and CHOICE is advocating to ensure these laws are strong and that they safeguard against new and emerging unfair business practices.

So, this sales season, be wary of any business practices that, although not illegal, are unfair, and add your support to our campaign for new fairness laws at choice.com.au/MakeUnfairIllegal.

ANDY KELLY



Retirement village developer taken to court, accused of dodging ombudsman

The energy regulator has taken a developer supplying electricity to a NSW retirement village to Federal Court, alleging the company took too long to become a member of the state's energy ombudsman.

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) launched proceedings against CAM Engineering and Construction Pty Ltd after repeatedly telling the developer it had to join NSW's Energy and Water Ombudsman because it was supplying power to the Cooranbong Gardens retirement village. The company is allowed to sell and supply electricity to residents through an embedded network at the village, but must also become a member of the ombudsman, which resolves consumers' energy complaints.

The AER alleges CAM Engineering took 16 months to join the scheme and says this meant residents were deprived of their rights.

"The AER's Retail Exempt Selling Guideline sets out important conditions to ensure consumers in exempt networks are provided crucial protections otherwise only available to consumers of authorised retailers," says AER board member Justin Oliver. "Failure to comply with the conditions denies consumers these important protections and has the potential to cause harm in an environment where consumers are already experiencing increased prices and many are facing financial hardship."

LIAM KENNEDY



Superannuation onboarding: How to fix it

When you start a new job, it's understandable if your super is back of mind. There's often a pile of paperwork, and it's easy to end up with an unwanted super account or to switch to an ill-fitting fund. The government is considering a raft of changes to modernise this process and make keeping a single, high-performing account simpler. To start, Super Consumers Australia says the government must ban super fund advertising through employee onboarding software. We've previously uncovered how MYOB's onboarding software could nudge new employees into Slate Super, an underperforming and high-fee fund that was linked to MYOB. MYOB has since terminated its relationship with Slate Super.

Being in a high-fee fund may sound minor, but the Productivity Commission found that a 0.5 percentage point difference in fees could cost a typical full-time worker \$100,000 by retirement.

"Letting funds advertise through employee onboarding software will see more Australians sign up for costly duplicate accounts and high-fee funds. Ultimately, people will have less to spend in retirement," says Super Consumers Australia policy manager Rebekah Sarkoezy. "Banning this advertising is vital to fix onboarding for new employees. It's time to stop letting companies exploit an overly complicated process for their own gain."

DANIEL HERBORN

Shopping around can save over \$1000 on home insurance

With about nine out of 10 policyholders experiencing an increase in their home insurance premium (See Weathering the storm, CHOICE Sep 23), finding savings is more important than ever. And shopping around can be the key to significant savings.

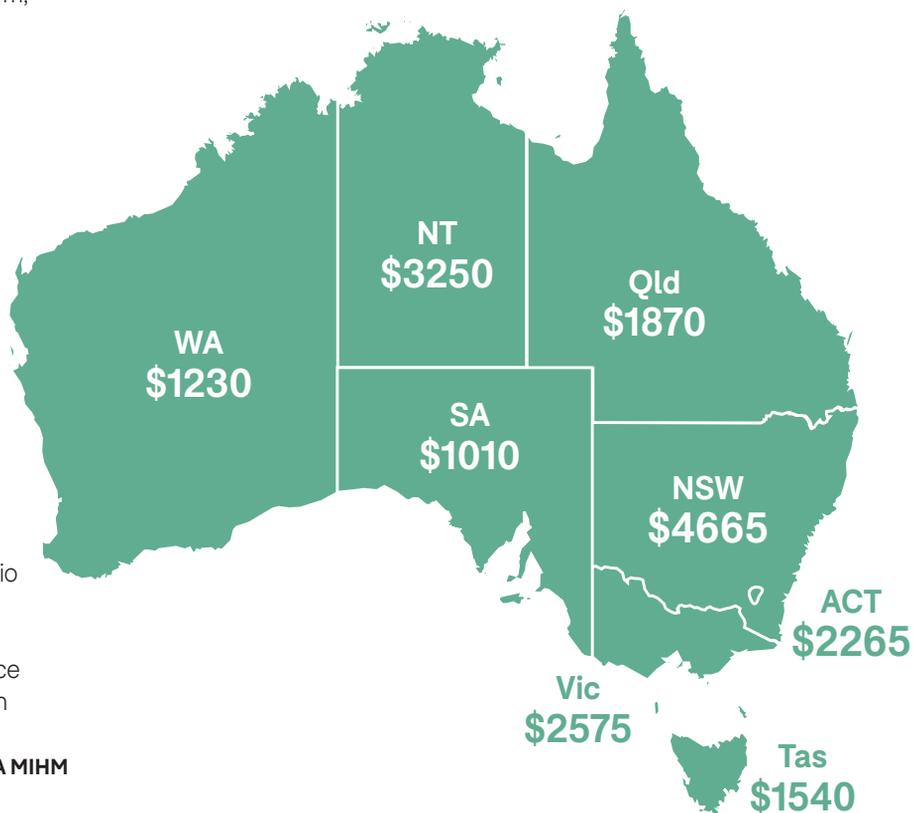
Before renewing your home insurance, get quotes from at least three insurers, including an online quote from your current insurer. Some insurance companies will match a competitor's premium and many give a discount to new customers.

We analysed quotes and found large differences between the cheapest and most expensive in each state. In NSW, for instance, you could find yourself paying up to \$4665 more if you chose the most expensive, rather than the cheapest, policy – for the exact same cover.

We used a sample of 2000 online quotes collected in July 2023 for an individual scenario in each state, including different home values between \$604,000 (Qld) and \$688,000 (NT).

For price ratings for over 50 home insurance policies, see our home insurance comparison at choice.com.au/homeinsurance.

The price difference between the cheapest and most expensive home contents policy in each state



UTA MIHM



RANTS AND RAVES

All work and no play: Why the internet has made gift giving so much harder

It was meant to connect us, make us smarter and our lives easier. And it has. But there's at least one corner of life where the internet and the broader digital connectivity it's encouraged has made things so much more difficult: gift giving.

I'm yet to meet anyone who claims to be a 'good' present-buyer or describes their intended recipient as anything other than 'difficult to buy for'. But once upon a time, if you were struggling to find a present for a loved one, which, let's face it, we all do, there were easy options to fall back on – DVDs, CDs, video games and other physical media.

Everyone's got a clutch of favourite movies and TV shows right? Well,

there's your answer – get them the latest they don't yet own or choose from the myriad of selections they might like. This wasn't even that long ago, but now it's been snatched from our grasp by digital giants offering us

the chance, at a relatively low cost, to watch, listen to or read whatever we want, whenever we want.

And I get it: it's a good deal, but I do find myself cursing the convenience when I need a gift idea.

Streaming has taken something that was already hard to do with any

great confidence and kicked it into the realm of near impossibility. We've all become difficult to buy for, as if it wasn't hard enough already.

We now have to face up to the fact that anyone we're buying a present for

Maybe the internet is delivering us a lesson, firm but fair: the era of half-baked present purchasing is over



has probably already watched, listened to or read everything that piqued their interest. I'm pretty sure the last DVD I bought as a birthday present seven years ago is still scratching out a lonely existence on a shelf somewhere, never to be viewed. And yes, some physical mediums, like vinyl records, have come back into fashion enough that they could be considered a viable gift option for some people, but I would argue their appeal is always going to be niche.

So, now we all have to work at becoming perfect gift givers, taking all factors into consideration and searching high and low to seek out the ideal present. If we go the extra mile (or two), there's less chance the person we have in mind has already snatched up what we're ruminating over via a simple online purchase.

But as I now consider this exact plan of action, I'm thinking perhaps it's not all that bad. Maybe the internet is delivering us a lesson, firm but fair: the era of half-baked present purchasing is over and it's time to go hard or go home.

In this era of quick gratification, if you want to give someone a useful present, you do have to actually go to the effort of sourcing something nice for them. Perhaps that's making for a more rewarding gift experience for all involved. And perhaps it means less cop-out gifts, destined to lay around unused.

LIAM KENNEDY



ASK THE EXPERTS

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q I'm planning a trip to the UK next year and I'm seriously questioning whether it's worth buying travel insurance. I know it's generally considered essential but I'm willing to foot the bill for an unplanned overnight stay somewhere or replacing a lost bag and the clothing inside. None of this would cost anywhere near as much as the premium anyway. I know I'm covered for any medical needs I might have while I'm there because of our reciprocal health care agreement. What do you think? Could it be OK to skip insurance in this case?

A CHOICE insurance expert Jodi Bird: In theory, travel insurance for the UK should be less expensive due to the existence of



reciprocal health care agreements with Australia, but it is worth shopping around for the best deal. Our advice is that travel insurance is still essential for countries with whom Australia has reciprocal health care agreements (like the UK). If, for example, you break a leg, you may find you can no longer fit into the economy class seat you'd booked for your flight home with your leg in a brace. Travel insurance will help with additional accommodation and travel costs and/or a medically assisted return flight home to Australia, should that become necessary. Otherwise you could find yourself stuck in the UK for longer than you planned, and at your own expense.

ARE
YOU
COVERED?

ASK US

Email your question to asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. You can also tap into the 'brains trust' at www.choice.community.

Q I'm thinking about buying an ice cream maker for summer because my kids go through so much ice cream, but looking at the recipes it seems like you need to cook the ice cream base well in advance of churning it (some recipes say to leave it to cool in the fridge overnight). Is it possible to make good ice cream yourself without having to wait so long between preparing it and eating it?

A CHOICE home economist

Fiona Mair:

A cooked custard ice cream base gives you a rich, creamy texture and the egg yolks in the custard also help to increase the volume.



But you are right, a custard base needs to be chilled in the fridge for about eight to ten hours before churning. If you have limited time, you can make a simple, no-cook ice cream by whisking together 1 cup of milk with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar until the sugar dissolves, then adding 2 cups of thickened cream, 2 teaspoons of pure vanilla extract and a pinch of salt. Cover and refrigerate for a couple of hours before churning.

While this is a good option for creating a quick, additive-free ice cream, the consistency won't be as uniform and it may not increase in volume as much as a custard base. The ice cream can be eaten straight after churning, but to create a scoopable consistency you'll need to put it in the freezer for a few hours.

If you want an even faster frozen treat, try making frozen yoghurt by simply mixing your yoghurt of choice (plant-based or dairy) with a liquid sweetener like maple or agave syrup and pouring it straight into the ice cream maker. If you're considering buying an ice cream maker, I recommend reading our ice cream maker review on page 44 to see which models performed the best.



Q We purchased a Merida Scultura 400 push bike for \$2499 on 13 April 2022. In October 2022 there was a problem with the rear wheel and the bike had to be returned for a repair. In November 2022, the same issue occurred and the shop lodged a warranty claim for the wheel to be replaced. Then, in March this year, a spoke on one of the wheels broke and it was repaired by a local bike shop. In July this year, there were further issues with the rear wheel and it was re-spoked under warranty using heavy duty spokes. In October, the rear wheel lost tension mid-ride and we returned the bike to the bike shop once again. At this point we feel that the bike isn't the quality it should be for the money we paid for it. What are our options?

A **CHOICE Customer Service:** If a product experiences a minor failure, the supplier can offer you their choice of a repair, replacement or a refund. However, if it is a major failure, the consumer can choose whether they would like to have the item replaced or refunded. A failure can be considered major if it creates an unsafe situation, means that the product can't be used for its normal purpose, or if it has either one serious problem or several smaller problems that would stop somebody from buying the product had they known about them beforehand.

In this case, it sounds like your bike may fit into the final category of a major failure, meaning you should be entitled to choose to have the bike replaced or refunded.

If you wish to pursue a replacement or refund, we'd suggest contacting the bike store via a formal complaint letter or email and explain to them that you believe the bike does not meet the consumer guarantee of 'acceptable quality'. Note which remedy you are seeking (replacement or refund) under the consumer guarantees of the Australian Consumer Law. Mention that you would like a resolution within a few business days and that if they do not respond, you intend to lodge a complaint with the Fair Trading department in your state.

IMAGES: GETTY / MERIDA



Q I am a nursing home resident and I use an electric mobility scooter. When the battery I had installed started to fail after seven months, the manufacturer told me I would need to buy new batteries because, after examining my scooter, they determined that I had "overcharged" them. I protested that I had never been given any instructions on charging my batteries, including in the battery owner's manual. The manufacturer offered me a discount on the replacement batteries and sent me links to two articles from specialist journals about the risks of overcharging batteries.

I now have my scooter back with the new batteries installed and the person who delivered it suggested that I limit charging to six hours a day (although there is no written paperwork or instructions confirming this). Charging for six hours a day seems difficult as most people (including me) charge it overnight. Do you think it is fair that I have had to pay for replacement batteries when I received no instructions on how to charge them in the first place?

A **CHOICE battery expert Denis**

Gallagher: You've touched on a pertinent issue that's likely to become increasingly relevant as we transition towards batteries as the main power source for everything from cars to power tools. There's currently a lot of confusion around how long to charge reusable batteries and whether it's wise to ever fully charge them. The answer is different depending on the battery type, material, technology and even the product it's used to power. Certainly an individual consumer could not be expected to know the optimal way to charge a battery without very specific instructions from the manufacturer.

This is something we at CHOICE are currently trying to learn more about, as we believe this information is important for consumers, and will become increasingly so over the coming years.

The situation with your mobility scooter does indeed sound unfair – as mentioned above, the ideal way to charge a battery is complex and varied and not something a consumer should be assumed to know. In terms of charging your new batteries for a maximum of six hours, you can buy a device for under \$10 from Officeworks or Bunnings that allows you to choose which hours of the day you'd like your appliance to be powered on. If you plug your charger into this and set it to six hours, this should let you charge your scooter overnight without overcharging.

