

Best and worst boiler brands



Our first ever survey of boiler customer satisfaction highlights the brands that are least likely to let you down – and one we think you should avoid. We also reveal five Best Buys from our boiler performance tests

Buying a new boiler is expensive and can be confusing. The cost of the boiler is often eclipsed by the price of installation, and there are safety issues to consider – so it's crucial that you make the right choice for both the product and the service.

To help you choose a boiler, we got the lowdown on popular condensing boiler brands by asking nearly 3,000 owners – all Which? members – about their experiences. Our survey also covered installation. To underline how important your choice of installer is, our undercover investigation into boiler engineers (p56) found some worrying examples of incompetence.

Most of those in our survey were satisfied with the installation of their boiler – 92% of those who had used an independent gas installer were satisfied with the process of installation, compared with 84% who had used British Gas.

If you're planning a boiler installation, try to get it done before the end of the year. The temporary 15% VAT rate will end on 31 December

2009, when it reverts to 17.5%. So you could save 2.5% of the normal cost of the boiler and installation if you do it before then – between £15 and £55 off installation, plus the saving on the boiler itself.

Best boiler brands

We asked 2,817 members who'd had a condensing gas boiler installed since April 2005 how satisfied they were with their brand and whether they would recommend it to a friend. This forms the customer score shown in the table, right. The table also reveals how many readers would definitely recommend their boiler brand. Of the 12 brands in our survey, two – Vaillant and Worcester – stormed to the top of our satisfaction table, both getting a customer score of 83%.

Popular brands Baxi, Glow-Worm and Potterton were also rated strongly, scoring 73%. There are Best Buy models from these brands, as well as Vaillant (see p54). So you can match excellent boiler performance with a brand other Which? readers recommend.

BOILER OWNER SATISFACTION			
	PROBLEMS WITH BOILER (%)	WOULD DEFINITELY RECOMMEND (%)	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
VAILLANT (426)	26	66	83
WORCESTER (927)	29	66	83
ALPHA (64)	42	52	74
BAXI (250)	38	49	73
GLOW-WORM (287)	39	51	73
POTTERTON (188)	36	47	73
VOKERA (34)	29	62	73
BRITISH GAS (203)	36	37	68
FERROLI (34)	41	50	67
HALSTEAD (30)	53	50	66
IDEAL (163)	44	36	64
KESTON (34)	76	26	47

Sample size in brackets



Vaillant 83%

Just 26% of Vaillant owners have had problems with their new boiler in the last four years – the lowest rate in our survey. In total, 34% of condensing gas boiler owners have had problems.

Vaillant is the second most common brand installed by Which? members, chosen by 15% of those who've installed a condensing boiler since April 2005. Vaillant got the joint highest satisfaction



score of 83%, alongside Worcester.

We've found that Vaillant boilers are often cheapest from online plumbing suppliers; get a list that covers all the parts (including the flue kit) that your installer will need, to price up your system.

We've tested four Vaillant boilers, and two are Best Buys (see p54). The other Vaillant models we've tested were good – the ecoTEC Pro 28 (67%) and the ecoTEC Plus 428 (66%). Visit www.which.co.uk/boilers to read full reviews of these models.

BEST BRAND

Very efficient and economical and a Which? Best Buy! Recommended by the central heating engineer, too.

Brilliant! Does exactly what I wanted it to do and provides on-demand heat or hot water 24/7.

Worcester 83%

Worcester is the most frequently bought boiler brand by those surveyed – 33% of Which? members who have installed a condensing boiler since April 2005 chose a Worcester model.

The brand got the best satisfaction score of 83%, alongside Vaillant, and there have been fewer problems than average with its new boilers – 29% of Worcester

owners have had problems, compared with 34% of condensing gas boiler owners in total.

Which? has tested five boilers from the current Worcester gas condensing range. None is a Best Buy, but one comes close – the Greenstar 30CDi Conventional, which scored 68% in our tests. Visit www.which.co.uk/boilers to read the full review of this model.



BEST BRAND

So far I am extremely satisfied with this boiler – the saving in energy costs compared with my previous conventional boiler with a hot water tank is quite noticeable.

Keston 47%

Keston boilers received the lowest customer satisfaction score in our survey, placing Keston at the bottom of the table with just 47%.

More Keston boiler owners said they'd had problems with their new boiler than owners of any other brand – a massive 76%, compared with 34% of condensing gas boiler owners in total. The problems and annoyances identified by the owners of Keston boilers

included the following:

- 24% experienced water leaking from the boiler
- 24% found their new Keston boiler noisy in operation
- 18% experienced problems with the boiler switching itself off



- 21% had water leaking from the condensate pipe.

We have tested only one Keston boiler, the Qudos 28H heat-only boiler, which is not a Best Buy. Our tests showed that the boiler was energy efficient and produced low emissions of polluting NOx gases but it lacks useful features and we found it confusing to use.

Visit www.which.co.uk/boilers for the full review.

WORST BRAND

I had to pay for internal pipes to be replaced because they had corroded to such an extent that the boiler cover was rusting.

Installation was fine but a number of faults developed.



COMBI

Baxi Duo-tec Combi 28 HE £690

Which? test score **79%**

PROS This is one of the few boilers we've tested that reaches the highest efficiency standards. It's user-friendly and ideal for flats and smaller houses.

CONS There's no timer. This model has now been superseded by an updated version.

Full review at www.which.co.uk/duotec28HE

We found it cheapest Online



HEAT ONLY

Glow-Worm Ultra-com 24 hxi £644

Which? test score **78%**

PROS It's rare that we find a heat-only boiler that is good enough to recommend, but this Glow-Worm ticks all the boxes for efficiency, low emissions and ease of installation, servicing and use.

CONS We couldn't find any.

Full review at www.which.co.uk/ultracom24hxi

We found it cheapest Online



COMBI

Potterton Gold C24 HE £757

Which? test score **74%**

PROS This combi condensing boiler is easy to use and combines high efficiency, low NOx (nitrogen oxide) emissions and convenient features.

CONS It's difficult to see the pilot flame. This model has been superseded by an updated version.

Full review at www.which.co.uk/goldC24HE

We found it cheapest Online

The Best Buy Baxi boiler reaches the very highest efficiency standards



COMBI

Vaillant ecoTEC Plus 824/831 £788/£868

Which? test score **73%/72%**

PROS The 24kW version is suitable for a small flat, while the 31kW model would suit a medium-sized house. Both have high efficiency, low NOx emissions and convenient features, and are easy to use.

CONS The timer is an optional extra.

Full review at www.which.co.uk/ecotec824 and [/ecotec831](http://www.which.co.uk/ecotec831)

We found it cheapest Online



HEAT ONLY

Ferrol Optimax 25 OV £604

Which? test score **72%**

PROS This heat-only boiler performed well in our tests, with good efficiency and admirably low emissions of NOx gas. It's also simple to use with straightforward controls.

CONS There are no instructions on the drop-down panel cover.

Full review at www.which.co.uk/optimax25OV

We found it cheapest Online



Which.co.uk

You'll find the full results of our performance tests on 52 gas and oil condensing boilers at www.which.co.uk/boilers. You can also read our guides to boiler contracts (www.which.co.uk/boilercontracts) and getting a good boiler service (www.which.co.uk/boilerservice).

Contacts

- Alpha 0870 300 1964
- Baxi 0844 871 1525
- British Gas 0845 675 0604
- Ferrol 0870 728 2882
- Glow-Worm 01773 824411
- Halstead 0844 371 1111
- Ideal 01482 498660
- Keston 020 8462 0262
- Potterton 0844 871 1560
- Vaillant 01634 292300
- Vokera 0844 391 0999
- Worcester 01905 754624

Getting a new boiler installed



Our survey found that 92% of those who used an independent installer were satisfied with the process, compared with 84% who used British Gas.

Who should fit it?

Engineers in Great Britain and the Isle of Man must be listed on the Gas Safe Register (which replaced Corgi in April 2009) to carry out work on gas installations and appliances. Gas Safe registered engineers have been checked to make sure they are qualified to work safely with gas. Corgi remains the registration body in Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. See our investigation on p56 for more on service engineers.



Buying from a gas utility company

Your gas supply company may have agreements with particular boiler makers, so it will have information

on only their products. Manufacturers will have a list of installers for their boilers in your area.

Buying direct

If you know which boiler you want, you could buy direct from a builder or plumber's merchant or order online, but make sure it matches your energy requirements. If your installer recommends a specific boiler, ring suppliers to compare prices or check online.

Discuss your needs

Ask your installer to come round and discuss your needs. They will take into account factors such as the number of radiators and bathrooms you have before recommending a boiler.

When the boiler is installed, make sure that you keep the certificate your heating engineer gives you. If you move house, you will need it to prove that the boiler was installed by a professional.

Checklist

10 essential questions you should ask when you choose your boiler installer

- 1 How did the installer decide on the size and make of boiler they've recommended? Some installers have a brand they prefer to install; if so, ask them why. Will they receive a discount, commission or manufacturer reward points from the sale?
- 2 How will a new condensing boiler be different from your older model?
- 3 How long will installation take?
- 4 Will they need to change any pipework?
- 5 Will the system need to be power flushed?
- 6 How will they handle the condensate plume? This is the cloud of steam condensing boilers produce whenever they operate, which can be a nuisance if the flue outlet is not carefully sited.
- 7 Where will they plumb in the condensate drain? Condensing boilers produce acidic liquid as they work, which needs to be drained away. Ask them for tips on how to avoid the condensate freezing in cold weather, which can cause problems.
- 8 What controls will you need to make your heating system most effective?
- 9 Is there a warranty and what will it cover?
- 10 How often should the boiler be serviced?



OUR RESEARCH

In April and May 2009, we surveyed 2,817 Which? online panel members about the condensing gas boilers they'd had installed since 1 April 2005. They were asked

about the brand, the installation process, and problems they had experienced with their new gas boiler. They were also asked to assess how satisfied they were and how

likely they would be to recommend their brand of condensing gas boiler to a friend. These two questions form the basis of the Which? customer score (see table, p52).

WHICH? LOCAL

If, like the vast majority of Which? members in our satisfaction survey, you're interested in using an independent gas installer,

check out www.which-local.co.uk for installers recommended by other Which? members in your area.

Find a local Gas Safe registered engineer in your area at www.gassaferegister.co.uk