



SNIFF TESTS

PET GEAR GOES HIGH-TECH

PLUS: BEST BUYS IN PET BEDS, CARRIERS, CRATES/KENNELS, LEASHES, PET SEAT BELTS & UNDERGROUND PET-CONTAINMENT SYSTEMS

High-tech has come to pet products, particularly those that promote safety and well-being. Be prepared to open your wallet, however, if you plan to walk your furry friend down that path.

By Sandy Robins

The pet-products industry delights in the ongoing love affair that we have with our pets, and a slew of new high-tech products were unleashed in the past 2 years that are designed to keep us connected to our pets 24/7, as well as to keep them safe and secure at home and when they're out and about. This trend, however, will have pet owners digging deep into their pockets.

KEEPING TRACK. Although you can play "I spy" on your pets via a standard home-security camera so you can find out what they do when they're home alone, new video cams that are marketed to pet owners have particu-

lar pet-centric features.

For example, by using a mobile app to connect a smartphone or a tablet computer to a pet video cam, you can play soothing music to settle an anxious pet, or you can talk to your pet and give it a treat no matter where you are.

The PetCube (\$199) lets you initiate interactive games with your pet. For example, it's the only product that we found that has a built-in laser that you can move around remotely to stimulate your pet, so it chases the laser's light. Pet video cams start at \$170, compared with entry-level home-security cameras that cost about \$100.

You also can keep track of your pet's health online. We found that the popularity of fitness trackers crossed into the pet space within the past 3 years. Wearable pet

activity monitors exist that track how long that Fido sleeps during the day and how often that he eats. You also can make sure that he stays properly hydrated by using a bowl that has a built-in scale that measures his water consumption, as long as he isn't a sloppy drinker. If your dog wears a camera on its collar (costing about \$70), you can see the route that a dog walker took your dog on their outing and see how they spent their time by checking an app that you download on your smartphone or tablet.

Meanwhile, our research found that the selection of pet GPS trackers that are available increased over the past 3 years. A pet GPS tracker, which a pet wears on its collar or harness, lets you set up zones

at your home and get alerts if your pet attempts the great escape. Many activity monitors also now have GPS functionality. We found at least 12 GPS-based activity monitors that start at \$70.

As with all GPS systems, pet GPS trackers use a cellular network and require you to subscribe to a provider's plan. However, manufacturers use a dedicated cellular network, so you don't have a choice in plans. Monthly rates typically cost about \$8, and annual subscriptions bring the monthly rate down to about \$5. We recommend that you ask whether the coverage of the network that's linked to the tracker is good in your area, because cellular coverage varies among networks.

According to our research, when

wearable pet tech gadgets came to the market, they were bulky and heavy, particularly for smaller pets. However, within the past year, devices were introduced that are light enough so smaller dogs and cats can wear them without being encumbered.

"We always encourage pet parents to also have their pets properly tagged [with identification details] and microchipped, in case they find themselves out of range," says Ben Jacobs, who is the founder and CEO of Whistle Labs, which makes pet GPS trackers and activity monitors.

Connected pet products all work with free apps, but not all apps work with all smartphones, particularly older

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Best Buys in Underground Pet-Containment

Best Buy Categories

- [P]—Premium selection
- [M]—Midrange selection
- [E]—Economy selection



SEE PAGE 64

Best Buys in underground pet-containment systems were selected based on features, warranty and the company's reputation for quality.

Automatic shut-off refers to an underground pet-containment system's capability to stop triggering static correction automatically if the animal lingers in the correction zone. For Best Buy selections, this duration is noted.

Progressive correction intensifies the correction of a pet based on the animal's distance from a boundary and the speed at which the animal approaches the boundary.

Unless otherwise noted, Best Buy underground pet-containment systems don't require professional installation.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change.

[P] DogWatch Hidden Fence System

MSRP: \$599; Best Price: \$599

>> The Hidden Fence System,

which is a repeat Best Buy selection and must be installed professionally, includes a combination of features that you'd have to pay at least an additional \$100 to get on another comparable system. You can fine-tune the correction of your pet to one of 20 levels on this system, which is by far the most of any underground pet-containment system that we found. We also like this system's AutoMemory feature, which adjusts the receiver's correction level automatically if your pet challenges the boundary.

Features:

- * Enclosed area: 1/4 acre; expandable to 200 acres
- * Wire gauge: 14, 16
- * Animal size: 3 lbs. and up
- * Correction levels: 20
- * Automatic shut-off: 15 sec.
- * Surge protection: Yes
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[M] Perimeter Technologies PCC-200 Plus

MSRP: \$247; Best Price: \$247

>> You'd have to spend at least an additional \$353 to get another underground pet-containment system that has a lifetime warranty, as the PCC-200 Plus does. This model's combination of a progressive-correction feature, a base 5-acre



DogWatch Hidden Fence System

enclosure area and a training DVD is unique among underground pet-containment systems that are in this price range. The **PCC-200 Lite** (\$219), which has five correction settings and is aimed at small, sensitive dogs, and the **PCC-200 Max** (\$308), which has 14 levels of correction and is aimed at high-energy, difficult-to-contain dogs, are also Best Buys.

Features:

- * Enclosed area: 5 acres; expandable to 25 acres
- * Wire gauge: 20
- * Animal size: 10–200 lbs.
- * Correction levels: 8
- * Automatic shut-off: 20 sec.
- * Surge protection: Yes
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[E] Dogtra E-Fence 3500

MSRP: \$220; Best Price: \$200

>> You'd have to spend an ad-

ditional \$180 to get an underground pet-containment system that has more expandable range than what the E-Fence 3500 provides. This model also is the only economy underground pet-containment system that has a nonstimulating pager system, so you can train your dog to stop before it reaches the correction zone.

Features:

- * Enclosed area: 5/16 acre; expandable to 40 acres
- * Wire gauge: 20
- * Animal size: 15 lbs. and up
- * Correction levels: 5
- * Automatic shut-off: 8 sec.
- * Surge protection: Optional
- * Warranty: 1 yr.

For more information about the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 50.

Best Buys in Pet Carriers and Crates & Kennels

Best Buy Categories

- [P]-Premium selection
- [M]-Midrange selection
- [E]-Economy selection



SEE PAGE 64

Best Buys in pet carriers and crates & kennels were selected based on quality of construction, features and performance.

All Best Buys have a 1-year warranty.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change.

PET CARRIERS

[P] Sleepypod Mobile Pet Bed
MSRP: \$190; Best Price: \$176

>> The circular, dome-shape Mobile Pet Bed is a repeat Best Buy selection, because we found that its top-loading design makes it easier for you to place a resistant pet inside of it than it is with other models, and it unzips to convert into a plush pet bed. The 1680-denier ballistic nylon that's used in the construction of this model is among the strongest grades of ballistic nylon that are used in the construction of luggage, which is rare among pet carriers.

Features:

- * Size: 17 in. (diam.) x 13-1/2 in. (h)
- * Airline-passenger-compartment compatible: No
- * Colors: Black, blue, brown, green, pink, red, white



Sherpa Original Deluxe

[M] Sherpa Original Deluxe
MSRP: \$63-\$84; Best Price: \$50

>> The Original Deluxe, which is a



Gen7Pets
Carry-Me Pet Carrier

repeat Best Buy selection, delivers exceptional value for a soft-shell pet carrier. No other pet carrier that's in this price range can match this model's variety of sizes. We also like this model's top and side openings, ventilation on three sides and Sherpa's Guaranteed-On-Board program, which guarantees full reimbursement for the cost of your airline ticket if you're denied boarding because of the pet carrier.

Features:

- * Sizes: 15 in. (l) x 10 in. (w) x 8-1/2 in. (h); 17 in. (l) x 11 in. (w) x 10-1/2 in. (h); 19 in. (l) x 11-3/4 in. (w) x 11-1/2 in. (h)
- * Airline-passenger-compartment compatible: Yes
- * Colors: Black, brown, gray, plum (purple)

[E] Gen7Pets Carry-Me Pet Carrier

MSRP: \$40; Best Price: \$35

>> The Carry-Me Pet Carrier has the best combination of features that we found in a pet carrier that's in this price range. This model's extra-large, lockable zippered openings on the front and rear of the carrier, its four-sided ventilation and its top ventilation are notable among economy pet carriers. This model also has a mesh drop side, so the pet can extend its head, which is something that no other economy pet carrier provides.

Features:

- * Size: 19-1/2 in. (l) x 9-1/2 in. (w) x 13 in. (h)

* Airline-passenger-compartment compatible: Yes

* Colors: Blue, gray, Raspberry Sorbet (red), Starry Night (black/gray)

CRATES & KENNELS

[P] Petmate Navigator

MSRP: \$35-\$200

Best Price: \$26

>> The Navigator, which is a repeat Best Buy selection, is the only plastic kennel that we found that has an adjustable divider that allows you to use the kennel from puppy/kittenhood to adult. We also like the added security that this model's unique dial latches provides, because they require the pet owner to turn the dial twice to secure the kennel door. This is an improvement over the simpler latches that other kennels have. No other plastic kennel that we evaluated has 360-degree ventilation, as this model does.

Features:

- * Sizes: 19 in. (l) x 12-3/4 in. (w) x 11-1/2 in. (h); 24-5/8 in. (l) x 16-29/32 in. (w) x 15 in. (h); 28 in. (l) x 20 in. (w) x 19-13/64 in. (h); 32 in. (l) x 21 in. (w) x 23 in. (h); 36 in. (l) x 23-19/64 in. (w) x 26-3/4 in. (h); 40 in. (l) x 26 in. (w) x 30 in. (h)
- * Color: Brown/tan

[M] MidWest Ovation Single Door

MSRP: \$49-\$128

Best Price: \$27

>> The steel Ovation Single Door stands out, because it has the company's exclusive door that swings up to rest atop the crate, which no other crate that we evaluated has. We found that the swing-up door is easy to use because of the design of its unique track mechanism. The Ovation Double Door (\$57-\$138), which adds a swing-out front door, is also a Best Buy.

Features:

- * Sizes: 26 in. (l) x 19 in. (w) x

21 in. (h); 32 in. (l) x 22 in. (w) x 24 in. (h); 37 in. (l) x 25 in.

(w) x 27 in. (h); 43 in. (l) x 29 in. (w) x 31 in. (h); 49 in. (l) x 31 in. (w) x 33 in. (h)

* Color: Black

[E] MidWest

Contour iCrate Single Door

MSRP: \$22-\$108

Best Price: \$13

>> The Contour iCrate Single Door is the best steel crate that we found in this price range. This model's patented technology has multiple locking points, which is something that typically is found only on higher end models. This model comes with a plastic pan and a dividing panel that lets you expand the crate as your pet grows. The Contour iCrate Double Door (\$31-\$113), which adds a side door, is also a Best Buy.

Features:

- * Sizes: 18-1/2 in. (l) x 12-1/2 in. (w) x 14-1/2 in. (h); 24-1/2 in. (l) x 17-1/2 in. (w) x 19-1/2 in. (h); 30-1/2 in. (l) x 19-1/2 in. (w) x 21-1/2 in. (h); 36-1/2 in. (l) x 23-1/4 in. (w) x 24-3/4 in. (h); 42-1/2 in. (l) x 28-1/2 in. (w) x 30-1/2 in. (h); 48-1/2 in. (l) x 30-1/4 in. (w) x 32 in. (h)
- * Color: Black

For more information about the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 50.



Petmate Navigator

(continued from page 52)

models. You should make sure that you have a compatible device before you buy a connected pet product.

PLAYING IT SAFE. High-tech pet products go beyond wearable products that monitor your pet. Now they include food bowls and water dispensers that automatically dispense food or liquid and exterior pet doors that open or close automatically when your pet approaches. These products are programmed to operate only for a specific pet via a sensor that's attached to the pet's collar or the pet's identification microchip. Most of these products use batteries, but a few use a home's electricity and include a battery backup.

Unfortunately, most of these high-tech products don't work when the power to your home goes out or the battery dies. Although most such products have a warning system, such as a flashing light, that reminds pet owners of when to change the product's batteries,



Dog Gone Smart Classic Lounger

only Wireless Whiskers' AutoDiet Feeder (\$170), which was launched in spring 2017, has an additional level of security that's called intelligent recovery.

If your home's power goes out and the feeder's batteries die, the feeder's recovery software opens the feeder's door, so its food remains accessible to your pet, says Steve Whalen, who is the inventor and owner of Wireless Whiskers.

Meanwhile, we found that pet safety in your automobile is getting more-serious consideration these days. For

example, even \$20 pet seat belts are crash-tested to ensure that they provide a particular level of safety.

However, no federal standard for pet seat belts exists, and experts say manufacturers use the federal standard for child seat belts as the baseline for pet seat belts.

Unfortunately, no independent agency tests pet seat belts. Center for Pet Safety, which is a nonprofit organization that says its goal is to set pet-safety/crash-test standards, hasn't tested seat-belt harness systems since 2013. Founder Lindsey Wolko tells *Consumers Digest* that manufacturers didn't fare well in her organization's tests of their products. Subsequently, manufacturers conducted their own tests.

A few manufacturers publish detailed data online that pertain to their products' safety and crash-testing, but, as is the case with any product that doesn't have a standard testing methodology, you have no way to compare the results. Plus, we found these results

✓ Best Buys in Pet Beds

Best Buy Categories

- [P]—Premium selection
- [M]—Midrange selection
- [E]—Economy selection



SEE PAGE 64

Best Buys in pet beds were selected based on quality of construction, features and product performance.

Most pet beds don't have a warranty. All Best Buy selections carry a guarantee against defects in the manufacture of the product.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change.

[P] Harry Barker Hemp Stripe Rectangle

MSRP: \$150-\$190

Best Price: \$150

>> Superb quality of construction sets the Hemp Stripe Rectangle apart from all of the other pet beds that we evaluated. This repeat Best Buy selection has a channel-quilted insert, which is

unique among pet beds that we assessed. The insert and a 5-inch gusset stop the filler material from shifting around under the weight of a pet, which helps this pet bed to hold its shape.

Features:

- * Sizes: 20 in. (l) x 26 in. (w) x 5 in. (h); 29 in. (l) x 36 in. (w) x 5 in. (h); 36 in. (l) x 44 in. (w) x 5 in. (h)
- * Colors: Blue, brown, green, orange, red
- * Cleaning: Machine-washable cover, spot-clean insert

[M] Dog Gone Smart Classic Lounger

MSRP: \$60-\$152; Best Price: \$49

>> The Classic Lounger is the only pet bed that's in this price range that's made of upholstery-grade 100 percent cotton canvas fabric. We like this model's fiberfill, because it does the best job among the midrange pet beds that we evaluated of bouncing back to a high loft when a pet exits the bed. The fill also has a silicone coating

FurHaven NAP Sofa Pet Bed



that we found eliminates lumping or unevenness better than do other midrange beds.

Features:

- * Sizes: 19 in. (l) x 15 in. (w); 22 in. (l) x 20 in. (w); 26 in. (l) x 24 in. (w); 32 in. (l) x 28 in. (w); 37 in. (l) x 31 in. (w)
- * Colors: Beige, brown, gray, red
- * Cleaning: Machine-washable cover

[E] FurHaven NAP Sofa Pet Bed

MSRP: \$25-\$40; Best Price: \$20

>> The NAP Sofa Pet Bed has features that typically are found in more-expensive pet beds, including thick convolute foam that has a quilted sleep surface and sup-

portive, bolstered sides. (Convolute foam has a ridged design like that of an egg crate.) This model is available with viscoelastic-foam filling or a cooling-gel insert for a 10 percent additional price.

Features:

- * Sizes: 20 in. (l) x 15 in. (w) x 5-1/4 in. (h); 30 in. (l) x 20 in. (w) x 6 in. (h); 36 in. (l) x 27 in. (w) x 6-1/2 in. (h); 44 in. (l) x 35 in. (w) x 8 in. (h)
- * Colors: Deep Pool (blue), Espresso (brown), gray, navy blue
- * Cleaning: Machine-washable cover, hand-washable foam core

For more information about the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 50.

to be tedious to wade through and interpret, and you have to take the manufacturers at their word that their published results are accurate.

It's unknown whether a pet-seat-belt standard and test will materialize, but that could change if automobile-insurance and pet-insurance companies endorse such safety systems.

"It's well-documented that unrestrained pets are a significant factor in distracted driving, and this can present risk for drivers, passengers and pets themselves," says Chris Middleton, who is the president of Pets Best Health Insurance. "We would support a federal motor-safety test designed specifically for pet-seat-belt systems."

UNLEASH THE HOUNDS. Many dogs have busy social lives, and we found that the latest premium leashes are designed to protect pets and owners from potential injury while helping to make walks comfortable and pleasurable.

Perhaps the most unusual design that we found is the new We Leash (starting *(Continued on page 64)*)

Best Buys in Leashes & Seat Belts

Best Buy Categories

- [P]—Premium selection
- [M]—Midrange selection
- [E]—Economy selection



SEE PAGE 64

Best Buys in leashes and seat belts were selected based on quality of construction, features, performance and warranty.

All Best Buy seat belts have a lifetime warranty.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change.

LEASHES

[P] Auburn

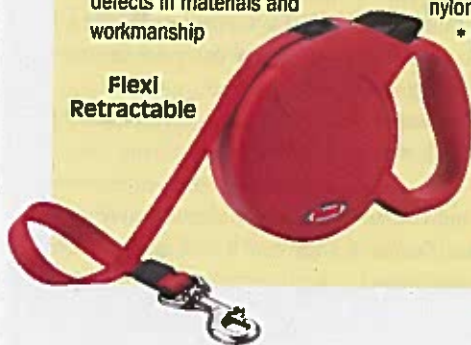
Multi-Function Lead

MSRP: \$62–\$68; Best Price: \$50

» The Multi-Function Lead is the only leash that we evaluated that has this combination of multi-purpose features and a quality-leather construction. This model has two carabiners (D-rings), so it converts easily into a 4-foot or a 3-foot leash. We also like that you can use this model hands-free, and it converts easily into a double leash, which is something that no other leather leash does.

Features:

- * Lengths: 6 ft., 8 ft.
- * Material: Leather
- * Warranty: Manufacturer guarantees product to be free of defects in materials and workmanship



Flexi Retractable

[M] Kurgo Quantum

MSRP: \$25; Best Price: \$25

» The Quantum is a repeat Best Buy selection because of its multi-functional capability in this price range. We found that its carabiner and loops along the length of the leash permit easy adjustment. This model also transforms into a hands-free shoulder or waist leash, and a simple adjustment of the carabiner converts it into a double leash, so you can walk two dogs at once.

Features:

- * Length: 3–6 ft.
- * Material: Nylon
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[M] Flexi Retractable

MSRP: \$22–\$48; Best Price: \$19

» We found that the Retractable, which is a repeat Best Buy selection, has the smoothest retracting action of any such leash that we evaluated. This model comes either corded or belted for the same price and is available in an array of styles. We particularly like the New Comfort style, because its handle can be adjusted to fit the user's hand better, which is something that we didn't find on other retractable leashes that we evaluated.

Features:

- * Lengths: 10 ft., 16 ft., 26 ft.
- * Materials: Plastic case, nylon belt or cord
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[E] Lupine Padded Handle Lead

MSRP: \$14–\$17

Best Price: \$12

» No other leash that's in this price range matches

the quality and variety of choices in color, pattern and size of the Padded Handle Lead, which is a repeat Best Buy selection. The manufacturer promises that it will replace the leash even if your pet chews it—a guarantee that no other manufacturer provides.

Features:

- * Lengths: 2 ft., 4 ft., 6 ft.
- * Material: Nylon
- * Warranty: Lifetime

SEAT BELTS

[P] Kurgo

Impact Dog Harness

MSRP: \$75; Best Price: \$75

» The Impact Dog Harness is the only seat belt that we found that has this model's combination of safety features. The company says it was crash-tested by using a simulated 130-pound dog, and it's made from a single piece of 4,000-pound tubular webbing, which we found makes the seat belt noticeably stronger than are other models. We also like this model's all-steel nesting buckles and reinforced bar tacking, which is a new safety design that isn't found on other models.

Features:

- * Sizes: 4

[M] Kurgo Enhanced Strength Tru-Fit Smart

MSRP: \$35; Best Price: \$31

» The Enhanced Strength Tru-Fit Smart is a repeat Best Buy selection because of its combination of safety features. This is the only seat belt that we found in this price range that the company says was crash-tested by using a simulated 75-pound dog. We also like this model's all-steel nesting buck-



Kurgo Impact Dog Harness

les and five adjustment points, which are a safety combination that's unique among midrange models.

Features:

- * Sizes: 5

[E] Solvit Economy Car Safety Harness

MSRP: \$20–\$23; Best Price: \$16

» The Economy Car Safety Harness is the only seat belt that we found in this price range that the manufacturer says has undergone strength testing of up to 2,000 pounds. This model integrates with the vehicle's seat-belt system and is fleece-lined for additional comfort. We like how easily that you can attach a leash to this model when you transition your pet to and from the vehicle.

Features:

- * Sizes: 4

For more information about the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 50.

PET PRODUCTS

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at \$37), which attempts to make your dog feel as though it's in charge of the walk. The leash has a handle at one end for the dog owner and a handle at the other end that the dog carries in its mouth. "By holding something, a dog feels more secure and is less likely to feel restrained or react inappropriately on a leash," claims dog trainer Jennifer Arnold, who designed the leash. "It's about the dog feeling he is in charge, too, as if he is taking his human for a stroll."

We evaluated the leash by using it on a 2-year-old Labrador retriever. We found that the leash, which We Leash says was tested for strength by using a horse, holds up, and the dog pulls much less than it does with a conventional leash.

Meanwhile, in 2017, Wigzi introduced a double retractable leash (\$40) that allows you to walk two dogs at the same time and control each dog individually. In other words, by adjusting each lead's length, the leash makes it possible for you to walk a dachshund and a Dalmatian together. You can control them by using the individual brakes should one or both dogs have to stop.

In March 2017, ThunderShirt introduced the Dial-A-Distance (\$50), which is a cross between a conventional retractable leash and a fixed-length leash. After you set it for a length of between 3 feet and 15 feet, the leash extends and retracts up to the selected length. This design allows the pet owner to select the safest leash range for different types of outings. For example, you can keep your dog next to you in Times Square and then give it more room to move when you reach Central Park.

Perhaps the ultimate in high-tech pet leashes is a smart dog collar (\$295) by Wagz, which is expected to hit stores in late 2017. This so-called invisible leash, which also includes GPS tracking and an activity monitor, vibrates the collar when your pet roams too far from your side. This should take walking the dog in a whole new high-tech direction. ♦

Sandy Robins has reported on pets and pet products since 2000 and authored four books.

What Is A Best Buy?



A CONSUMERS DIGEST Best Buy is a product that delivers exceptional value for a given amount of money. That doesn't mean that it's simply the least expensive product that's in its category. A Consumers Digest Best Buy is one that merits special attention from consumers based on its combination of eight criteria:

performance, ease of use, features, quality of construction, warranty, efficiency, styling, and maintenance and service requirements. Because virtually all product categories cover a range of prices, there's no such thing as *the* Best Buy, in practical terms.

Of course, every product category includes many excellent, worthwhile products, but some of these we don't deem Best Buys, because their high price relative to competitive models excludes them from consideration. For us, value is defined through a simple equation: perceived quality divided by cost. Consequently, price (the manufacturer's suggested retail price, specifically—not retail price) is a key consideration in selecting our Best Buys. As overall quality increases and cost remains the same, value increases; likewise, as overall quality remains the same and cost decreases, value also increases.

The process for selecting Consumers Digest Best Buys is rigorous. It begins with identifying all of the products that are available to U.S. consumers in a particular category. Often that list is long (50–100 models). We call it the product universe. All model information must derive from manufacturers—not retail, website or other sources. Manufacturers represent the most reliable source. On average, only a small percentage of all products that we evaluate are deemed Consumers Digest Best Buys.

The first step in evaluating products for Best Buy consideration is to ensure that they meet four basic criteria: national availability in retail stores or through an established online retailer; a national dealer network/service organization to support repairs/service; a manufacturer of established reputation (unless it's part of a genuinely new technology); availability for at least 6 months after the publication date of Consumers Digest's Best Buy recommendation.

The products that meet these criteria then are assessed based on the eight specific criteria listed above. This assessment is carried out in numerous ways: hands-on use; review of independent evaluation/testing; review of reports from government agencies and others; interviews of retailers and service technicians; review of evaluations from other entities. Our research methodology is based on using a product as it was designed to be used in real life. Many are the situations in which Consumers Digest staff samples numerous models to include first-hand experience in the overall evaluation of various models in a category. These have included assembling and using 25 different outdoor grills; putting a half-dozen carpet cleaners through their paces; and assessing the security of entry-door locks in terms of their resistance to being picked.

When all of the hands-on evaluation, where applicable, and all other research is complete, the number of products that are under consideration for recommendation is dwindled to a select few. These are grouped by price range, because products come at multiple prices and consumers have different price levels at which they define value. The products that we ultimately deem Best Buys typically will be classified into three categories: [P] Premium selection, which denotes that a product is full-featured and delivers excellent performance but is priced accordingly; [M] Midrange selection, which indicates that a product has many desirable features and good performance at a price that's below the top of the line for the category; and [E] Economy selection, which means that a product delivers satisfactory performance through basic features at an advantageous price for cost-conscious consumers.

Every product-category evaluation is spearheaded by Consumers Digest senior editors. On each product evaluation, at least one expert evaluator/writer is hired to collaborate. In the automotive category, for example, four experts whose experience totals 128 years' coverage of automobiles contribute to our ultimate recommendations in 13 categories of cars, pickups, minivans, SUVs and hybrids.