

TEST LAB HANDHELD STEAM CLEANERS

Portable steam cleaners are convenient and light, but they lack the cleaning power to impress in our lab tests



Best and worst steam cleaners

Which? members asked us to test portable steam cleaners, so we pitted 11 models against grime, wine and dog smells

Portable steam cleaners are light and easy to carry, but do they clean well? To find out, we tested how they tackled a variety of stains, compared with elbow grease and a Best Buy cleaning product (or highest-scoring product from previous tests). Portable steam cleaners look like handheld vacuum cleaners with a water tank. There's a nozzle to direct steam to loosen dirt, and many can be used with attachments such as hoses, brushes or upholstery tools to make it easier to steam a range of surfaces. We tested them on scummy tiles, grubby glass, stained upholstery and baked-on oven grime.

GO ONLINE and check our new steam cleaners guide where you'll find expert buying advice and full in-depth reviews of all the handheld steam cleaners and steam mops we've tested. Exclusive to Which? members at www.which.co.uk/steamcleanersapr

Pros

- Light and easy to carry around the home
- Steam cleaning can help control dust mites
- Good on grease and stains that dissolve easily
- Good for reducing pet smell and fabric creases
- Hoses and attachments make getting steam into tight spaces easier
- Scrubbing and wiping attachments make it easy to dampen and clean at the same time

Cons

- Not good at removing non-soluble stains
- May need to polish surfaces afterwards to achieve a streak-free finish
- Small tank size limits steaming time and most tanks need to cool before you refill them
- Some models produce a lot of water
- Power cord length may limit reach
- Difficult to track down on the high street

upholstery, but steam cleaners often left fabric soggy and the stain still obvious. **Glass** Glass covered with layers of dried-on oily film was less streaky after cleaning with Windowlene Original (£2.50, 500ml) than a steam cleaner and squeegee attachment. **Oven grime** No handheld steam cleaner made a dent on baked-on oven grime, but one application of Best Buy Lakeland Oven Mate (£8.49, 500ml) produced great results. **Refresh fabrics** A win for steam cleaners. We lined a dog's bed with a piece of calico curtain for a week and tested to check if creases and dog smell were removed by steaming. Steam cleaners did better than a Best Buy iron with vertical steaming function. Most reduced smell and were great on creases. But some made the fabric too wet to get rid of either.

OUR VERDICT

The hassle of refilling steam cleaners means a chemical cleaning product is generally better. We weren't convinced handheld steam models have the capacity to make cleaning super quick, or the power to shift tough grime. A steam cleaner generally shifts grime more quickly than cleaning by hand. But most handheld models only give seven to eight minutes of steam at a time and you should let them cool for five minutes before refilling. If cleaning takes longer, you may spend as much time waiting to refill and reheat the tank as you'd gain by using a steamer. A good one, such as the Best Buy Thane, may add power to elbow grease but many are unimpressive.

PHOTOGRAPH BY: STEPHEN MARWOOD

How do you clean your oven?

Our tests showed steam cleaners couldn't shift baked-on oven grime, so how do you clean yours? Share your secrets and help shape our testing. Go to www.which.co.uk/grime



BEST BUY

Thane Housewares H20 Mop X5 £100

Which? test score 66%

PROS This is mainly a steam mop (which was close to being a Best Buy in our steam mop test) but it can be converted into a handheld steam cleaner by removing the mop handle. It comes with attachments including an extension hose, window cleaning and garment steaming tools that are easy to attach. It's good for

cleaning glass; minor streaks just need wiping down afterwards. It's also good at removing smells and creases from fabric. It takes just 21 seconds to heat, and produces a lot of steam. The steam switch locks on until pushed off. It's easy to use the filling cap and the maximum fill level is clearly shown. You can refill the tank without leaving it to cool first. **CONS** It produces a lot of water and is no better at cleaning than

the multi-purpose, glass or fabric cleaning products we compared it against. It's not as good for stains on bathroom tiles and fabric as on other surfaces. Soap scum and red wine remained slightly visible after treatment. There's no real handgrip to make it comfortable to hold and no filling funnel is supplied. Steaming time is just over seven minutes – not long for cleaning. It's available via mail order. **Available at** Thanedirect.co.uk



DON'T BUY

Montiss Steam cleaner CSC5375M £36

Which? test score 38%

PROS The list of good things we could find to say about this Don't Buy is pretty short. Using the nozzle and brush attachment gives good results on grubby grout and soap-scum covered tiles, in less time than a multi-purpose cleaner. We found that it's reasonably easy to attach and remove the tools and it does

produce a lot of steam, which helps with cleaning. **CONS** We had problems using it because of the loose-fitting control knob. It takes more than three minutes to heat and the steaming time of just under 7.5 minutes is not a long time for cleaning. You need to leave it to cool for five minutes before adding more water to the tank. It also feels a bit heavy to use. It doesn't come with a filling funnel.

It was reasonable at cleaning glass quickly using the squeegee attachment, but the finish was poor. It was streaky and needed a good wipe afterward. It takes a fair amount of effort to scrub tiles. There is no upholstery tool and it had no effect on a red wine stain on fabric. It's also very poor at refreshing fabric; it became very wet, but didn't lose its creases or doggy smell. **Available at** Amazon.co.uk

STEAM CLEANERS ON TEST											
SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE								TEST SCORE (%)
			Price (£)	Heating time (mins)/ Weight with a full water tank (kg)	Cleaning time (mins)/ Cleaning tiles and grout	Cleaning glass	Cleaning fabric	Refreshing fabric	Operating the cleaner	Ease of use	
1	THANE HOUSEWARES H20 Mop X5		100	1.6	0.5/ 7.5	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	66
2	SHARK Portable Pocket Multi-Purpose Steam Cleaner		90	1.4	0.5/14	★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★	57
3	VAX S4 Grime Master		50	1.5	3/8.5	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	57
4	DOMOTEC Portable Multi Steamer DSC21		80	2.2	5/16.5	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	54
5	KARCHER SC952 1600W Handheld Steam Cleaner		49	1.1	0.5/7	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	51
6	BIONAIRE Multi-purpose handheld BA70333UK		40	1.4	3/7.5	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	50
7	BELDRAY Handheld Steam Cleaner BEL0019		18	1.5	2.5/7	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★	49
8	BUSH SC155H Plus Handy Handheld Steam Cleaner		33	1.8	2.5/7.5	★★★	★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	48
9	ELECTROLUX Z355A Enviro Steam Gun		49	1.8	2.5/5.5	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	48
10	POLTI Vaporettino Lux		39	1.9	2/6.5	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★	44
11	MONTISS Steam Cleaner CSC5375M		36	1.6	3/7.5	★★★	★★★★	★★	★	★★★	38

GO TO WWW.WHICH.CO.UK/STEAMCLEANERS FOR FULL REVIEWS AND STEAM MOP RESULTS

USING THE TABLE

Best Buys are highlighted in red. The more stars the better.

SPECIFICATION Price Turn to p27 for details.

Heating and steaming time

Rounded up or down to the nearest half minute.

PERFORMANCE Cleaning tests These include the amount of time

and effort to clean each surface and satisfaction with the result.

Refreshing fabric Based on the difference in odour and creases before and after steaming.

Operating the steamer

A five-star steam cleaner heats quickly, produces the most steam, doesn't lose steam pressure when tilted and steams for longer.

SCORE

Ignores price. Based on: Cleaning and fabric refresh65% Ease of use.....20% Operating the cleaner15%