

# CONSUMER NEWS UPDATE

FROM THE NATIONAL CONSUMER FEDERATION  
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## POSTWATCH JOINS THE BLOGGERS

Howard Webber, the newly appointed Chief Executive of Postwatch is delighted to announce that Postwatch's blog [www.postwatchuk.blogspot.com](http://www.postwatchuk.blogspot.com) is up and running.

On the occasion of the launch he said: "Organisations need to innovate or they become stale. Organising a blog is a bold move by Postwatch and shows that we are keen to explore all ways of discussing issues with customers. The blog provides a new channel of communication for everyone."

"The blog will be updated regularly by Postwatch. More important, it can be used by others to give their views on postal matters. Postwatch is looking forward to hearing about customer experiences, good, bad or indifferent. We want to hear from all customers and from the postal industry itself."

For more information contact Daryl Barrett on 020 7259 1223 or e-mail [daryl.barrett@postwatch.co.uk](mailto:daryl.barrett@postwatch.co.uk)

## FREE TICKETS!

BBC Studio Audiences are pleased to announce that consumer champion Esther Rantzen is due to take part in a forthcoming recording of BBC Radio 4's *The Personality Test*. This comedy panel show is all about the guest host - they set the questions and run the show by their rules! Facing the whims of the guest host are comedians Lucy Porter, Robin Ince and Sue Perkins.

BBC Studio Audiences would like to invite any interested members of NCF to join the live studio audience for this event. All tickets are free and the recording will take place at the Bloomsbury Theatre on the evening of Monday 18 December. Tickets are available by calling 0870 9011227 or by logging on to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/whatson/tickets/shows/personality.shtml>

We look forward to welcoming you to our audience. With thanks and best wishes to NCF

Alison Duncan  
BBC Studio Audiences

## RENEW YOUR TAX DISK AVOIDING THE POST OFFICE!

We have heard a lot recently about the Post Office card account being opened up to other providers, threatening the livelihood of many sub – postmasters. There is another nail in the Post Office coffin which being rather smaller has received hardly any publicity.

You can now save yourself the hassle of trying to find that MOT certificate and the Insurance certificate, which you put in a safe place for just this occasion. You do not need them, it seems. You are on the computer and that is what counts. No more long queues at the Post office either.

Well, you might still have to go to the Post Office as, when I tried the phone number given [0870 850 4444]; it was "temporarily out of order".

A day or two later it worked. It took only seconds for the system to check that I had a current insurance and MOT certificate. I gave my credit card details to pay for the tax disk and in less than the promised five days I received it in the post.

It is a little worrying that all this data is on some central computer, which one hopes is totally secure, but who else has access? Presumably the police must find this very useful. Can they now find out my credit card number from the same source? That could also be useful and not only to them.

You might find that your card has been debited by a large amount for a traffic offence about which you know nothing because someone else was using your number plate. The more one's data is recorded somewhere, the more likely is it that it will be used fraudulently, or at least mistakenly.

## SPEED RESTRICTIONS FOR COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

The worry of having a big van, probably from a foreign country with the driver on the wrong side, pounding along inches from your bumper while you travel at 70mph on the motorway, only to have it

sweep past you on the next downhill section, may be much reduced next year.

European regulations, requiring the fitting of a limiter to all vans and other commercial vehicles over 3.5 tonnes registered since 2001, will apply from 1<sup>st</sup> January. It will prevent them from exceeding 56mph. This will be extended to all such vehicles of any age in January 2008. [Times Nov 23]

This does not, of course, eliminate the scourge of the white van man as he usually drives a smaller vehicle.

### FREE LIGHT BULBS

There is no such thing as a free lunch, we are told. But there are, it seems, free energy-efficient light bulbs to be had. According to The Financial Times on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, BSkyB is offering customers free energy efficient light bulbs with set-top boxes. BSkyB engineers will give customers that they visit three light bulbs, a move that could see customers saving about £10 from their annual electricity bill for each bulb used

### A WAIVER FOR YOUR CREDIT CARD

On the same day the Daily Mail carried a story that Visa had announced plans to offer credit and debit cards that customers will be able to wave or tap over a scanner without the need to key in a pin number. Visa believes that the system, which will allow purchases of up to £10, will be suited to newsagents, car parks & fast food outlets.

With this facility available perhaps we shall see car park charges of £10 and packs of chicken nuggets at the same price or multiples. "All you have to do", says the shop assistant, "Is to wave the card twice if you want two". Image how costly it might be if your friendly little boy got hold of your card near the scanner.



### CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

May I take the opportunity to wish all readers a very happy Christmas and a prosperous and healthy New Year.

### WHICH? WARNING

The November Which? Magazine contained an article about online shopping in which it said that readers could save £49 if they bought an Apple iPod Nano from [www.getflashing.com](http://www.getflashing.com)

This may well still be the case, but in an email from Which? Member Services that I received on December 5<sup>th</sup>, advice is given not to use the website at the moment as it is being investigated by a local trading standards department.

Which? Says it will update [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk) with more details when they become available and further information will appear in the January issue of Which? Magazine.

### TESCO ON LINE

I read in The Independent on Sunday that Tesco is conducting a trial of selling clothing online. Prices will be the same as in the stores plus postage and packing.

### GAS SUPPLY IN CAMDEN

A look at the recent list of licence applications to the Gas and Electricity Marketing Authority reveals that most of them are for shipping and transporter licences. However one is for a gas supply licence and it is from the London Borough of Camden.

There is a large appendix that lists all of the properties to which Camden would like to supply gas. Many of them are district heating schemes but there are also plenty of blocks of flats and individual properties.

This seems to be an interesting enterprise that Camden Council wishes to embark upon. We all know that wholesale prices of gas have fallen but retail prices have gone up and up. In fact OFGEM has threatened to take action against energy companies that do not pass on this drop in prices to their customers.

Perhaps the idea is that Camden will be able to buy gas at wholesale prices and supply its premises at a considerable saving. I wonder if other Councils are thinking along the same lines?

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