Which? Shorts - Stop! Are you really getting a good Black Friday deal?

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**James Rowe:** Hello and welcome to Which? Shorts. The podcast that each week gives you a flavour of one of the Which? Magazines, and brings to life a piece that was written by one of our brilliant writers. This week we're looking at Black Friday. With the big day just around the corner, many retailers have already started offering eye catching deals.

But are the savings really as good as they appear? In the December edition of The Which? Magazine, Ellie Simmons and her team dug deep into the pricing history of more than 200 Black Friday deals to find out how many were cheaper, or the same price, at other times of the year. Her investigation reveals the different tactics used by retailers, and The confusion experienced by even the savviest of shoppers, and some of the very dodgy looking deals.

Here's her piece, adapted for the podcast, this week read by me, James Rowe. Here at Which, we looked at more than 200 deals on popular products advertised by some of the biggest retailers during 2023's Black Friday, and checked their pricing history 6 months before and 6 months after the big day itself.

We've been running this test annually for several years now and, for the first time ever, this time every single one of them was available for the same price at other times of the year. Not only that, but many of the products were actually cheaper at other times of the year, around 4 in 10 deals. And while you may expect prices to fall over time, we found 11 percent of the products we looked at were cheaper than their Black Friday price in the 6 months beforehand.

Take an espresso coffee machine we found at John Lewis for example. It looked like a great deal at 499. 95, down from 699. 95. But it was cheaper than this for 30. 32 days in the six months before Black Friday, including just 479. 95 four months earlier. Then there's the Hisense 43 inch smart 4K TV with Amazon Alexa at Curry's.

It was 249 on Black Friday, reduced from 429. But just 15 days after Black Friday, it was reduced yet further to 229. In fact, it never went back above its Black Friday price in the entire 6 months afterwards. The way in which Black Friday deals are presented differs quite significantly between shops, and learning to decode the language of deals can help you understand more about the savings you may, or may not, be getting.

For example, all the deals we found at Amazon, and some at AO. com, used a Recommended Retail Price, or RRP, to show the saving. On the face of it, these look much the same as a WAS price, but there's a crucial difference. The item doesn't have to have ever been sold at the RRP by that store. RRPs are simply the amount the manufacturer suggests the product be sold for.

Amazon advertised the Samsung Series 5 Plus heat pump tumble dryer for 629. 99 on Black Friday last year. Setting it against its RRP of 789. 99. But it had never been sold at 789. 99 by Amazon in the entire 12 months prior. In fact, the highest price ever reached was 719, so it appears that the saving of 160 simply wasn't real at Amazon.

How frequently and recently the higher price used to illustrate a deal has been charged, if, in fact, it has ever been charged at all, is key to whether a deal is genuine or not. So this year, for the first time in one of our Black Friday investigations, we unpicked the pricing history of the deals we looked into to see if those higher prices were genuine.

For 6 and 10 deals we looked at, the higher price had been in place less than half the time the product was available in the year before the promotion. Shockingly, this included 14 supposed deals where the higher price hadn't been charged once at that retailer in the previous 12 months. If you're appalled by this, you're not alone.

When we showed a nationally representative sample of consumers an ad with a was now price, 44 percent assumed the higher price would have been charged to shoppers for longer than the promotional price. It's no wonder many people told us they don't trust the way deals are presented. We think there's too much dodgy tactics on promotional deals.

We're calling on retailers to clean up their act, including only quoting savings against the most recent previous price, and only quoting higher previous prices if they were in place for longer than the lower promotional price.

This is what the retailers had to say when we showed them our findings. Amazon said, We offer customers great value year round through price matching to ensure prices are as low or lower than other retailers and fantastic seasonal deal events like Black Friday. It said that it based savings off validated reference prices customers had recently paid on Amazon or were recently offered by competitors.

AO said, We always offer customers great value and our price match guarantee matches against any other retailer all year round, not just a select few like others. Which his findings are based on only 2 percent of Black Friday deals, which misses the point. Meanwhile, John Lewis said customers can find brilliant offers year round, but our reimagined never knowingly undersold Brand Promise, which matches prices with 25 leading retailers, gives customers absolute confidence.

Meanwhile, Currys said it was the first major retailer to promise none of its 3, 000 plus Black Friday deals for 2024 had been cheaper in the past six months. It's said more than half of its Black Friday deals in 2024 would be at lowest ever price. If there's only one piece of advice you take away this Black Friday, it's not to let yourself feel rushed.

Retailers want you to feel time pressured, as you're more likely to spend more and make poorer choices. Time and time again, which research has shown that many products yo yo in price, increasing and decreasing in regular cycles. Sites such as Pricerunner and CamelCamelCamel show pricing history so you can check whether this applies to the item you want to buy.

However, tech products tend to buck this trend, usually following a slower, steadier decline in price as the age. Whatever you're buying, just make sure you focus on the price, not the claimed saving, as our investigation shows. The latter can sometimes be spurious. Be wary of unusual brands, too. Not every manufacturer you've never heard of is bad, but there's often a good reason why certain brands aren't household names.

Similarly, know the life cycles of products. This is particularly pertinent for tech products, which often follow known trajectories in their pricing depending on when new models are launched. TVs, for example, are often released in the spring, meaning this can be a good time to get a great price on a slightly older model.

Prices on the latest releases tend to fall steadily from the autumn onwards. If you order online, Click and Collect will often save on delivery fees. But check the returns policy before choosing a retailer, as some will charge for returns, while others offer them for free. If you're shopping in store, use your phone to compare prices at other retailers to ensure you're not paying more than you need to.

And finally, there are ways you can save even more while shopping on Black Friday. You could use cashback sites such as Quidco and Top Cashback, just check they're offering the same price as the retailer itself. Or you could use a cashback credit card or debit card to earn money back on your purchases.

Oh, and don't forget about us here at Which?. We often find offers on poor scoring or even don't buy product to claimed savings that simply aren't true. But there are always a few genuine bargains to be had. So if you're in the market for a new TV or airfryer, or want to see if you can save some money on Black Friday, We can help.

Our expert team trawls through thousands of deals to find you genuinely good prices on genuinely good products. Using pricing history data and our industry leading market knowledge, we keep an eye on price fluctuations and let you know whether a product is at its cheapest point based on the past six months of pricing.

From washing machines and vacuum cleaners to headphones and laptops, the products we share on our deals pages have all been put under the Which? Microscope, meaning we only recommend offers on items we know perform well. We have a dedicated page on our website that tracks Black Friday deals, or why not sign up to our deals newsletter to get the best deals we've found, delivered inbox.

Links for both of those are in the show notes.

That piece was originally written by Ellie Simmons, and published in the December edition of The Which? Magazine. To read it in full, then be sure to become a Which? Member. I'll pop a link in the show notes for you to find out more. You'll also find links in the show notes for our Black Friday deals pages, as well as the quick and easy steps you can take to sign up to get the book.

Our free deals newsletter, delivered to your inbox every month. We'll be back next week for another episode of Which? Shorts, but in the meantime, why not check out some of our other weekly podcasts from us here at Which?. We've got the Money Podcast, where we give you a dose of financial advice every Friday, and Get Answers, where we tackle everyday consumer problems every Monday.

Just search Which? Money, and Which? Get Answers, wherever you're listening. Which? Shorts was produced and edited by me, James Rowe, while the Exec Producer was Samara Mackereth.