CONSUMER GUIDE

Starting this year, product listings can now be found in each section.

6 ADAPTIVE TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY
- The Great Vacuum Cleaner Search
- Three Can’t-Miss Tools
- Making Music Hands-Free

23 HEALTH AND HYGIENE
- Change Your Doc’s Attitude
- Ditch the Smelly Legbag
- Botox for Bladders
- Ideal Bladder Volume
- Doctor Visit Tips

39 FITNESS AND SPORTS
- No-Frills Cardio Equipment
- Desk-ercize: Take a Workout to Lunch

45 MOBILITY AND SEATING
- Navigating the Changing Mobility Market
- When to Change Cushions

63 AUTOMOTIVE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES
- Choosing an Adaptive Vehicle
- Insuring Your Adaptive Equipment

71 DISABILITY SERVICES
- Using Your Independent Living Center
- Detailing Your Chair

77 DISABILITY MEDIA
- Web-based Video Info on Spinal Cord Injury

This year our Consumer Guide also features statistics from “15 Interesting Questions for Wheelchair Users,” a survey in our November e-newsletter answered by 344 readers at press time. These stats appear throughout the issue, at the top of selected pages. Here is one interesting question to get started:

Which statement is more true for you?

I will use devices for any functional gain, no matter how small: 61%
I might skip a little gain in function if I think the device makes me look “more disabled”: 39%
LIFE INSIDE A VACUUM (CLEANER)

BY MARK MATHEW BRAUNSTEIN

it was way too heavy for me to lift and carry with one hand, so I could not maneuver it in and out of tight spots. I could not return it in the shredded box. Instead I gave away the heavyweight champ and bought a lightweight.

You know the brand, named after its inventor. It was so light that I could lift it with one finger, just like in the ads. But it cleaned floors hardly any better than a manual carpet sweeper. Carpet sweepers cost far less, require no costly replacement bags, make little noise, consume no electricity, and drag around no power cord that inevitably coils around my wheelchair’s casters and wheels. So I reverted to using my old carpet sweeper and stashed my upright vac into the closet, where it now is gathering dust.

Next I bought a backpack vac, whose canisters you wear on your back. They all are industrial models with industrial-strength prices, but I refused to let cost deter from my pursuit of the wheelchair-accessible vacuum cleaner. Again shopping online, I chose a model that looks like a jetpack capable of propelling its wearer into the air like Superman.

With the backpack vac on my back, I found my backrest obstructed my range of motion. Further limiting mobility was that dang power cord, again. Actually this cord was worse. Thick and heavy, its industrial-strength cord was unwieldy and weighed as much as the backpack vac, which was considerable. And it was uncomfortable, designed to be worn while standing. I learned that the human back has a different curvature while seated. Soon enough, I returned back to my old manual carpet sweeper and added the backpack vac to my arsenal in the closet, where it, too, now is gathering dust.

One summer day, I sat in a friend’s backyard where she put me to work while she prepared our lunch. She handed me her lawnmower. It was lightweight, compact, and electric. A power cord dangling from a mower surely would get mauled, so this was cordless. Cordless? Eureka!

Next day I shopped online for battery-powered cordless vacuum cleaners and found only a handful. Before I name names, let me assure you that I have received no compensation from the manufacturer for my endorsement. In fact, you will read this before they do. That said, I bought a Dyson handheld vac, model DC35. It really is handheld, meaning I can hold it with only one hand, while my other hand navigates and propels my wheelchair. This vac really rocks!

Among the Dyson’s full array of attachments is a motorized floor tool that cleans carpets as efficiently as did my heavyweight upright. The cordless Dyson DC35 runs on a rechargeable lithium-ion battery. When set to high power mode and used with the motorized floor tool, its charge is advertised to last a scant six minutes. A convenient untruth! Mine lasts 20 minutes. Nearly two years old, the battery still shows little sign of aging or of a reduced charge.

Meanwhile I am showing signs of aging, indicated by my own reduced stints on vac patrol. I thoroughly enjoy my 20-minute stints on vac patrol. This vac could not have arrived at a better time in my life. I truly have found happiness living inside a vacuum.

Mark is a frequent contributor to New Mobility. You can read more of his work at MarkBraunstein.org.