

## Pick a paint

Our testing finds several top performers, including three low-odour paints, says **Chris Barnes**.

**A** new coat of paint can really transform a room, but painting is a messy and time-consuming business, so you'll want to get it right first time. Choosing the colour is one step, and proper preparation of the walls and other surfaces is very important, but what about the paint itself? It's hard to judge quality based on the information on the can, and price isn't necessarily an indicator of quality either.

CHOICE tested 21 low-sheen acrylic paints – the most commonly used paint type

### What's the gloss?

- **Flat** Very low gloss. Good for hiding minor surface imperfections. For ceilings and walls in low-traffic areas.
- **Low-sheen** For most interior walls. Generally good stain resistance.
- **Satin or silk** Slightly glossier than low sheen, and for similar use.
- **Semi-gloss** More stain-resistant and easier to clean. For hallways, kitchens, bathrooms, doors and trim.
- **Gloss** Very stain-resistant and easy to clean. For furniture, doors, bannisters, trim, kitchens and bathrooms.

for interior walls – for hiding power (see below), how well they handle washing and scrubbing, and stain resistance. We tested white paint; adding tints may affect the hiding power (a darker tint will probably improve it) but should have no effect on resistance to washing, scrubbing or staining.

- **Hiding power** is a measure of how well the paint covers underlying marks or patterns. A paint with a comparatively low score here may need an extra coat (perhaps three instead of the usual two) to cover walls with a lot of marks or with a darker base colour. The Haymes Ultra Premium is the standout performer here (see page 69), with Taubmans Endure and Finish Premium paints also delivering excellent results.
- **Washing resistance** determines how well the paint stands up to washing with a sponge and soapy water. All the paints passed this test.
- **Scrubbing resistance** measures how well the paint stands up to a bristle brush and abrasive cleanser. Taubmans Endure impressed here, taking a massive 2725 scrubs before it showed significant wear. A lower score here doesn't mean the paint can't be scrubbed safely, but does indicate it may wear faster than better-scoring paints.
- **Stain resistance** measures how easily we could remove coffee, red wine, tomato sauce and crayon from each paint. Several paints performed well, with Pascol and Endura ahead of the rest.

### Nutshell

- CHOICE tests 21 low-sheen acrylic interior paints.
- Five paints come out on top, but one star performer from our test in 2004 comes last this time.

### BIO a no go?

In our last paint test back in 2004, BIO Wall Paint Interior HD was one of the top performers, with the highest hiding power score (90%). But this time around it came bottom, with a hiding power score of just 52%. We were so surprised by its disappointing performance that we tested a second sample, with only marginally better results. BIO makes claims for minimal volatile organic compounds (VOC) content (see below) and other environmental and health benefits, but with the lowest claimed coverage rate (eight to 10 square metres per litre) of any of the paints on test, you should be able to expect excellent hiding power. The manufacturer, BIO Products, told CHOICE they are surprised by the result and will reformulate the paint from scratch to improve the hiding power.

### Why does paint smell?

The heady odour you often get from paint is usually due to VOCs. These are solvents that keep the paint's complex mixture of ingredients in solution (or "wet"). Low-sheen acrylic paints such as those on test generally don't have particularly high VOC levels. ▶

Nevertheless, VOCs are present and excessive or repeated exposure can lead to painter's syndrome, with symptoms such as headaches, dizziness and nausea. VOCs, which are absorbed through the skin and lungs, have been linked to skin conditions and diseases of the lung, liver and reproductive organs and can exacerbate respiratory symptoms in asthma sufferers. They also contribute to smog and can affect indoor air quality for several months after the smell has gone.

Fortunately, VOC risks for the occasional DIY painter are minimal.

Keeping the room well-ventilated during painting and for a few days after is important to let the air clear.

Increasingly, the level of VOCs in paint is reducing. In our 2004 test, only the BIO claimed not to contain VOCs. In this test, 12 paints claim to have low odour or low VOCs, and three claim no VOCs – see the table below. Those claiming zero VOCs may still contain tiny amounts (not enough to be noticeable). If you have respiratory problems or are sensitive to paint fumes, consider a low odour/low VOC paint, such as the Haymes, Australis and New Look paints in our What to Buy list (opposite), or a zero VOC paint – Resene is the best of those on test. ■

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

**Coverage rate** A larger coverage rate means the can of paint will go further. Most paints claim a maximum coverage rate of 14 or 16 m<sup>2</sup>/L.

**Low odour / Low VOCs** See left for why low VOC content is beneficial.

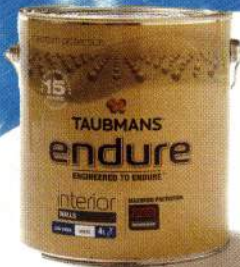
**Mould/mildew protection** Contains an additive to inhibit the growth of mould, mildew and fungus. The Taubmans Easy Coat, Finish, Berger, Pascol and British Paints products contain an anti-mildew agent. You can also buy anti-mildew additives separately and mix them into a paint.

For full details of this test, including how we test paint, go to [choice.com.au/paint](http://choice.com.au/paint)

	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS		COSTS	
	Overall score (%)	Hiding power score (%)	Scrub resistance score (%)	Stain resistance score (%)	Low odour / low VOCs	Zero VOCs	Recommended max. coverage rate (m <sup>2</sup> /L)	Contact	Approximate price per litre (\$)	Cost/10 m <sup>2</sup> coverage (\$)	
<b>Taubmans</b> Endure Interior Low Sheen	90	90	95	88			16	taubmans.com.au	16	10.00	
<b>Haymes</b> Ultra Premium Interior Expressions Low Sheen Acrylic	88	99	55	70	✓		16	haymepaint.com.au	15	9.38	
<b>Australis</b> Interior Pristine Low Sheen	86	87	80	88	✓		16	colourtrend.com	14	8.75	
<b>Finish</b> Premium Interior Low Sheen	82	91	55	70			16	danks.com.au	15	9.38	
<b>New Look</b> Xtrawear Low Sheen Acrylic	82	86	58	88	✓		14	paintaustralia.com.au	14	10.00	
<b>Duralex</b> Premium Low Sheen	79	89	47	65	✓		16	duralexpaints.com.au	13	8.13	
<b>Taubmans</b> Easy Coat Walls Low Sheen	79	80	82	68			16	taubmans.com.au	13	8.13	
<b>Taubmans</b> Living Proof Silk Low Sheen	79	83	51	85	✓		16	taubmans.com.au	16	10.00	
<b>Accent</b> Interior Premium Low Sheen	78	86	46	75	✓		16	mitre10.com.au	14	8.75	
<b>Pascol</b> Living & Bedroom Interior Low Sheen	77	81	44	90	✓		16	wattyl.com.au	14	8.75	
<b>Solver</b> Maxi Wash Ultra Premium Low Sheen	76	77	56	88			16	wattyl.com.au	15	9.38	
<b>Endura</b> Trade Low Sheen Acrylic	75	79	44	90			16	danks.com.au	12	7.50	
<b>Resene</b> Zylone Sheen VOC Free	75	78	63	75		✓	11	resene.com.au	16	14.55	
<b>Dulux</b> Wash & Wear 101 Low Sheen	74	74	66	83	✓		16	dulux.com.au	17	10.63	
<b>Wattyl</b> Interior Design i.d Luxury Low Sheen	73	71	66	88	✓		16	wattyl.com.au	16	10.00	
<b>Duralex</b> Everclean Acrylic Low Sheen	71	74	54	75	✓		16	duralexpaints.com.au	19	11.88	
<b>Berger</b> Premium Interior Acrylic Low Sheen	68	72	44	73	✓		16	berger.com.au	13	8.13	
<b>ecolour</b> Eco Living Interior	68	72	47	70		✓	14	ecolour.com.au	18	12.86	
<b>Dulux</b> Once Low Sheen Acrylic for Interiors	67	66	63	73			12	dulux.com.au	20	16.67	
<b>British Paints</b> InColour Interior Low Sheen	66	70	40	73	✓		16	britishpaints.com.au	18	11.25	
<b>BIO</b> Wall Paint Interior HD	56	52	58	70		✓	10	bioproducts.com.au	17	17.00	

**USING THE TABLE Scores** The overall score is made up of: Hiding power: 70%; Scrub resistance: 15%; Stain resistance: 15%. All the paints score 100% for resistance to washing, so this is not factored into the score. **Approximate price per litre (\$)** Based on 4L can, where possible – 4L or larger cans are most cost-effective per litre.

## WHAT TO BUY



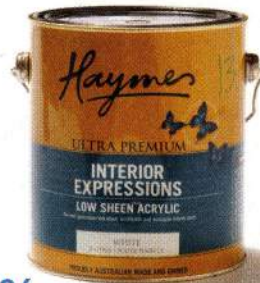
**90%**  
**Taubmans Endure Interior, \$16/L**

### Good points

- Only excellent overall performer on test.
- Excellent hiding power.
- Best scrub resistance on test.
- Excellent wash resistance.
- Very good stain resistance.

### Bad points

- None to mention.



**88%**  
**Haymes Ultra Premium Interior Expressions, \$15/L**

### Good points

- Excellent hiding power – best on test.
- Excellent wash resistance.
- Good stain resistance.
- Low odour.

### Bad points

- Only OK for scrub resistance.



**86%**  
**Australis Interior Pristine, \$14/L**

### Good points

- Excellent wash resistance.
- Very good hiding power, stain and scrub resistance.
- Low odour.

### Bad points

- None to mention.



**82%**  
**Finish Premium Interior, \$15/L**

### Good points

- Excellent hiding power.
- Excellent wash resistance.
- Good stain resistance.

### Bad points

- Only OK for scrub resistance.



**82%**  
**New Look Xtrawear, \$14/L**

### Good points

- Excellent wash resistance.
- Very good hiding power.
- Very good stain resistance.
- Low odour.

### Bad points

- Only OK for scrub resistance.

### PAINTING TIPS

- **Calculate the area to be painted**, multiply by two if you're applying two coats and divide by the paint's coverage rate (marked on the can) to work out how many litres you need.
- **Clean all paint flakes, dust and grime from the wall.** Fill any holes or cracks with a suitable filler and smooth the wall with fine sandpaper.
- **Clean any dust and debris from the can** to prevent it getting into the paint.
- **Stir the paint well with a flat paddle**, and also occasionally while painting.
- **Start with the ceiling**, and paint walls from top to bottom to avoid splashing areas you've already done.
- **Avoid painting in extreme heat**, cold or humidity.
- **Keep enough leftover paint for touch-ups.** Any excess should be sealed in a can and disposed of according to council guidelines.
- **Wipe excess water-based paint from your brushes on old newspaper** to clean, then soak them before a final rinse.

## About the rest

**M**ost of the other paints perform well overall but don't give as good hiding power or scrub resistance as the recommended paints. WattyL disagreed with our results for the WattyL and Solver

paints, saying their testing has found better hiding power. Similar comments came from the Accent distributor. Bristol Easy Living was being reformulated at the time of testing, so we didn't include it.