News in brief

TRANSPORT

Parking debt firms exceed 60% profit

Companies charging fees for recovering parking ticket debts have an average profit margin exceeding 60 per cent, a document has revealed.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said the figure showed that there was a "market failure", while the AA branded it "disproportionately high".

Debt recovery agencies are used by parking operators to attempt to collect money for unpaid tickets. They charge drivers extra fees of up to £70 per ticket. A legal challenge prevented a ban on the charges.

EQUALITY

Frostrup warns on Trump's policies

Donald Trump's move to abolish diversity policies has been a "major backward step" for gender equality in the workplace, Mariella Frostrup has warned.

The broadcaster said that the US President's decision to issue executive orders to end diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes would risk undoing recent progress on boosting gender equality.

"It won't happen overnight. But I think these are policies that drag everybody backwards," she cautioned.

Frostrup (below) fears that firms in the UK may follow suit.

SCIENCE

Wi-Fi signals 'can track heart rate'

The signal from a household Wi-Fi device can be used to monitor heart rate – without the need for a wearable device, research has shown.

Scientists from the University of California at Santa Cruz designed a system, dubbed Pulse-Fi, for accurately measuring heart rate.

The team trained an algorithm to distinguish faint variations in Wi-Fi signals caused by a human heartbeat.

They found that the Pulse-Fi system worked regardless of the position of the equipment in the room.

FAMILIES

The joys and challenges of becoming a single gay father at 31

Thomas Anderson had the strong urge to be a parent and didn't want to wait until he met a partner. He tells **Kasia Delgado** about his journey and the rewards

'In the lead-up to the adoption, I met everyone involved in my son's life' THOMAS ANDERSON

Growing up, I always knew I would want to be a dad someday. I had this real sense that I would love it. I worried, though, that because I was gay, it might not be possible. It was a really terrible feeling to worry that it might never happen, assuming that I would need to be straight, or at least in a couple, to become a parent.

It was 2016, in my late 20s, that I felt really ready for parenthood, and began to look into it properly, do research and focus on it. I realised that it might be possible after all, and that adoption was the way I wanted to do it. There are so many kids out there who are missing a family, so if they get a parent, and I get to become a parent, we both win.

I was single, and I knew I would have to be with someone for at least two years before we could apply to adopt, and that was if they even wanted kids. I felt that time was ticking for me, in the sense that I very much wanted a child. A friend got pregnant, and I knew I didn't want to wait anymore and take on the chance of meeting someone romantically. At 29, my desire to be a father was much stronger than my desire to be a partner.

I was scared, though, that being gay and without a partner was going to be a disadvantage in the process, that I would get looks, judgments, and comments from people thinking it was strange that I was an adoptive dad. I knew nobody gay at my age going down this route, so I wasn't sure how it would all work.

When I decided to begin looking into adoption, my friends had mixed responses. Some felt nervous for me, that I was going to do it by myself, and they had reservations around how I would feel if it didn't work out.

But mostly they were not surprised that I was going to try, because I had always been around kids – I work in social care – and also when I put my mind to something, I tend to get it.

I went to an information evening at St Andrew's Children's Society, a voluntary, independent adoption and fostering agency. They were so lovely to me, and treated me with respect and kindness.

So much work goes into the adoption of a child, from social workers, local authorities, the adoptive parents. It's not like the old days where an adopter would wait by the phone for a call about a child; things are much more involved.

I went to an exchange day where adopters talk to local authorities and adoption agencies to try to find a match.

As an adopter, you get a sense of the foster carers of the children, and the social workers got to meet me. A few months later, I was fortunate enough to have a match. It happened quickly for me, but I know people who have waited two or three years.

I was at work when I found out that I had been found a four-year-old son. I was overwhelmed, I cried, I laughed, I felt so many things. I actually almost collapsed in my office from the intensity of the emotion. I went home and bought a "Happy Birthday, Nan" card for my mum. It was the best present ever for her, finding out she was going to have a grandson, and that I was going to be a dad. Lots of screaming and shouting of excitement from my family.

Thomas Anderson and his son fly the flag at Pride THOMAS ANDERSON

In the lead-up to the adoption, I met everyone involved in my son's life, including his foster parents, his social workers and then I was introduced to him. Meeting him and spending time with him, it was definitely nerve-wracking and then there was no mad rush of love, no instant love. It just felt so completely normal to be with him.

As soon as I saw a picture of him, it seemed natural. People sometimes say their world cracked open when they saw their baby for the first time, but for me it was just like this was meant to be, like I had always known him. The first time I saw him, he ran to me and we just watched TV – it was normal, in the most amazing way. That's when I knew that it was all worth it.

We had a transition week, where we built up the amount of time that I spent with him. I would put him to bed at his foster carer's house, and then be there in the morning to wake him up. Then when he came to stay with me, the social worker stayed a couple of days to make sure all was fine.

So much had been happening behind the scenes to get me ready for adoption, I was going to information and preparation groups to learn about the worst-case scenarios, and I was as prepared as you can be, because nothing can fully prepare you.

After I adopted him, I was on adoption leave for a year and while he was at school I went to extra training, putting the work in to equip myself with as many tools as possible that I might need in the future as an adoptive dad.

I spoke to some local Scottish press about adopting as a single, gay man, because I wanted to raise awareness that it is possible, that if any single adopters out there want to be parents, they might be able to make it happen.

I was the first single, gay man to have adopted a child in Scotland. I got some online hate – old-school homophobia, people saying nasty things, cruel and horrible stuff about me being a single man who has adopted a boy, as if there's something weird about me.

But I reasoned that if people want to judge you, they will, but I don't take any of it on board. The people who matter in my life, in my community, were supportive and congratulatory.

My son has had silly comments from other kids, not about him having a single gay dad, but about being adopted. "You're adopted," they've said, as if that's an attack, but they don't even really know what that means. It just sounds like an insult to them.

He has now started at high school and he is proud of being adopted – the students had to introduce themselves and he said straight off the bat: "I'm adopted, let's move on."

I was surprised he did that, but well done to him.

People are definitely much more surprised that I have adopted as a single man than the fact that I am gay. There are lots of people out there who would love to be single adopters, but they probably don't know it's possible. I would encourage anyone who feels they want to adopt, to look into it, and have hope. Make sure you have a village, though, because even with a village it is hard.

It is really difficult to go through the adoption process, and it is difficult to be an adoptive parent, but it is a small amount of difficult compared to the amazing life you can give a child. He is my whole world.

> A growing number of single men are pursuing parenthood through surrogacy, adoption or fostering, and there was a record number of single-parent adoptions in 2018.
>
> A single man is eligible to adopt a child in the UK and the main factor is that they can offer the child a safe environment and that there is a good support network around them.
>
> LGBT+ people in Scotland have had the right to adopt since the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act came into force in 2009.

FOOD

I tried eight tinned tomatoes – one Italian brand stood out

They can make or break dishes so buying the right brand can be vital to make your food sing, writes **Giulia Crouch**

They are a staple in every kitchen cupboard, yet tinned tomatoes are sold at a surprising range of prices. Does spending double really get you double the quality? Are trendy cherry tomatoes superior to classic plums? And how much tomato do you actually get in a can?

First, let's clear one thing up. Take it from my Italian *nonna*: never buy chopped. Whole tomatoes – whether plum or cherry – tend to be better quality and more flavoursome.

Plus, they give you complete control over consistency: you can blend them silky smooth, roughly chop, or leave them chunky, depending on the dish.

Here, I have sampled eight cans of tomatoes from different supermarkets to find out which ones are worth your money – and which are best left on the shelf.

THE WINNER

Mutti Peeled Whole Plum Tomatoes
£1.50 for 400g. Sainsbury's
For me, these are the greatest tinned tomatoes of all time. They have so much more flavour than any other brand, tasting fresh, sweet, tangy and even slightly umami all at once.

Texture wise, the tomatoes are firm, fleshy and immersed in a smooth, velvety sauce. Because they are of such good quality, it is nice to use them in dishes where they can really shine, rather than masking them under too many other flavours – think a simple pasta sauce or a shakshuka.

They are, however, some of the most expensive out there, but they are totally worth it. They are 100 per cent Italian and contain nothing but peeled tomatoes and tomato juice (most others contain the preservative citric acid).
Rating: 5/5

Italian Cherry Tomatoes, Vine-Ripened
£1.25 for 400g. Tesco
Tesco's tinned cherry tomatoes are sweet, juicy, and bursting with flavour – so much so that you could almost eat them straight from the tin. They sit in a thick, rich tomato juice that makes it easy to whip into a quick sauce.

When I gently fried an onion in extra virgin olive oil until soft, added a few capers and basil leaves, then tumbled in the tomatoes with a pinch of salt and let it simmer, and stirred through spaghetti, the result was perfect: a brilliant balance of sweetness, tang, and umami.
Rating: 4/5

Italian Plum Tomatoes
65p for 400g. Marks and Spencer
These plum tomatoes are less than half the price of M&S's cherry variety, yet in my opinion, they pack far more flavour. For just 65p, the tin is full of juicy, sweet, and substantial tomatoes in a well-balanced sauce.

The tin notes that the tomatoes are "packed in season," and it really shows in the taste. Simple, versatile, and reliable.
Rating: 4/5

Napolina Peeled Plum Tomatoes
£1 for 400g. Sainsbury's
These tomatoes are plump and intact and sit in a relatively thick juice, not the pale watery liquid that cheaper tins sometimes deliver. The flavour is round and ripe, leaning towards sweetness rather than sharp acidity which make them a reliable base for a quick tomato sauce for a midweek pasta dinner.

The tin is generously packed, with a good ratio of fruit to juice, which means that although they sit at the mid-range price point, they still feel good value for money.
Rating: 4/5

Deluxe Italian Cherry Tomatoes
75p for 400g. Lidl
Sometimes Lidl really comes through, and this is one of those occasions. These tinned cherry tomatoes taste every bit as good as some of the more expensive brands, but at a fraction of the cost.

If cherry tomatoes are your preference and you don't want to splurge, these are an excellent choice. They have a fresh aroma and a pleasingly sweet flavour.
Rating: 4/5

THE CHEAPEST

The Grower's Harvest Plum Tomatoes
45p for 400g. Tesco
At 45p, these are the cheapest of the bunch and you know what? They're not bad. Let's face it, most of us use tinned tomatoes as an ingredient, not a food to be eaten on their own, and for that purpose they're perfectly acceptable.

They are a little on the watery side, sure, but within a stew it doesn't much matter.
Rating: 3/5

Italian Cherry Tomatoes
£1.50 for 400g. Marks and Spencer
Plenty of supermarkets have added cherry tomatoes to their tinned ranges in recent years. They look appealing on the label and in the pan, but the flavour isn't automatically superior to standard plum tomatoes (and yet they're priced as if they are).

In fact, plum varieties often deliver a deeper, more rounded taste. These M&S cherry tomatoes, though, do bring something different: they're sweet, bright and hold their shape nicely in cooking, so you get those satisfying bursts of tomato in your dish.

Still, at £1.50 they are at the premium end of the market but without the depth of a classic peeled plum tin. That said, they are fun as an occasional alternative.
Rating: 2/5

Duchy Organic Plum Tomatoes
£1.30 for 400g. Waitrose
An organic offering from Waitrose and not a bad price. The fruit is plump and fresh-tasting but the juice it is sitting in feels watery. Once cooked down into a sauce with other ingredients this isn't a problem, but if you wanted to have them as they are, say with your English breakfast, the pronounced tang might become overpowering for some. They are no better than some of the cheaper offerings.
Rating: 2/5