



NEW TWISTS FOR GARAGE-DOOR OPENERS

Manufacturers are raising the bar when it comes to operating your garage door. Compatibility with technology that is built into your vehicle and allows you to control your door has become standard on nearly all models, but now you can control your door with the swipe of a finger or via your cellphone.

By Drew Vass

The way that most people open a garage door is as instinctive as breathing: Just reach for the push-button remote that's clipped to your vehicle's overhead visor. And yet garage-door-opener manufacturers and other companies that make accessories for garage-door openers are trying new ways to allow you to open and close your door. These new twists include fingerprint-recognition technology and cellphone control. (See "Wrong Number: Cellphone-Based Remotes Too Costly," page 32.)

But all of the new systems that are on the market will drive up the price that you'll pay for a garage-door opener by at least 18 percent. And in many cases, the new remote-entry

systems are not any easier to use than to push that button that's on your visor.

REMOTE POSSIBILITIES. When it comes to opening and closing your garage door, the traditional push-button remote won't become obsolete anytime soon (if ever) because of the high cost of the alternatives. Nearly all of the new technologies require that you pay at least \$80 extra for a third-party remote or a remote that's sold separately by a garage-door-opener manufacturer.

Even existing technology that has moved into nearly all models will take a bigger bite out of your pocketbook. For instance, all but four garage-door openers that are on the market now are compatible with HomeLink universal garage-



SOFT TOUCH.
The latest keyless entry systems for garage-door openers include devices that allow you to control the door by scanning your fingerprint.

door-opener-remote technology. You no longer have to pay a premium of at least \$50 to get a garage-door opener that uses HomeLink—a button that typically is built into the rearview mirror or a vehicle’s overhead panel that allows you to open or close your garage door, like you did 4 years ago. But you will have to pay at least \$23,000 (and often more) for a vehicle that has HomeLink. At press time, HomeLink was offered on approximately 160 different 2010 vehicle models.

If you’re tired of pressing buttons, Chamberlain, Craftsman and Liftmaster

(as well as aftermarket manufacturers Master Lock and Xceltronix) sell devices that open and close the garage door when you pass your index finger over a sensor. These devices are designed to replace standard keypad-based keyless entry systems. They’re typically mounted to the garage-door frame or to a post that allows you to reach the device from your car window. The manufacturers refer to this technology as *biometric-based keyless entry*. It was brought to garage-door openers in late 2007. These devices recognize only the fingerprints that you program into them, and they’re

easier to work than a standard keypad-based entry system is, because there are no number codes to enter or remember. They also eliminate the possibility that someone will lend out your access code.

Fingerprint-control devices that are sold by Chamberlain, Craftsman and Liftmaster work interchangeably with existing garage-door openers of these same brands that have a 315-MHz wireless receiver. A universal receiver (roughly \$28) will make older models of these brands (and even a few models by other manufacturers) compatible with fingerprint-control remotes. (*Editor’s note:* Chamberlain and Liftmaster are owned by the same parent company; Chamberlain is the original equipment manufacturer for Craftsman garage-door openers.)

To see whether your garage-door opener is compatible, visit the manufacturers’ websites or look at the packaging that is on fingerprint-control remotes. You can pay as much as \$60 for a fingerprint-control remote.

At press time, the fingerprint-control

✓ Best Buys in Garage-Door Openers

Best Buy Categories
[P]=Premium selection
[M]=Midrange selection
[E]=Economy selection



Best Buys in garage-door openers were selected based on quality of construction, ease of installation and of use, motor type and power, quietness, safety features and warranty.

All Best Buys have rolling-code technology, which constantly changes the code that is sent from the remote to the opener to prevent

code capture; safety sensors; and compatibility with HomeLink, which is a built-in remote-control system for automobiles.

All Best Buy screw-drive models have 1/2-hp motors and 120-watt incandescent lighting.

Unless otherwise noted, the parts warranty that is on all belt-drive Best Buys includes the belt.

Prices do not include installation, which typically costs from \$80 to \$150.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time and is subject to change.

SCREW-DRIVE GARAGE-DOOR OPENERS

[M] Chamberlain MyQ
MSRP: \$244; Best Price: \$237
>>The Chamberlain MyQ has the best warranty of all screw-drive models. It includes lifetime coverage on parts; no other model has

more than 3 years’ coverage on parts. This model is the only DC-motor screw-drive model that has two three-button remotes and a keyless entry system as standard.

Features:
* Remotes: 2 (3 buttons)
* Warranty: Lifetime motor, parts

[E] Liftmaster 1050
MSRP: \$179; Best Price: \$174
>>The Liftmaster 1050 is the least expensive screw-drive model that has a DC motor. Its motor warranty is 3 years longer than that of any other screw-drive model that is in this price range.

Features:
* Remotes: 2 (1 button)
* Warranty: 10 yrs. motor; 2 yrs. parts

CHAIN-DRIVE GARAGE-DOOR OPENERS

[P] Craftsman 1300
MSRP: \$265; Best Price: \$239
>>The Craftsman 1300 is the least ex-



pensive chain-drive model that has a 3/4-hp DC motor and a lifetime warranty on all components. We just wish that it came with more than one remote control. A **belt-drive** version (\$265) is also a Best Buy.

Features:
* Motor: 3/4-hp DC
* Remote: 1 (2 buttons)
* Light: 120 watts, incandescent
* Warranty: Lifetime motor, parts

[M] Chamberlain MyQ
MSRP: \$179; Best Price: \$166
>>You’d have to pay at least \$50



remote was a standard feature on just one garage-door opener. That belt-drive model—the Craftsman 53939—has an MSRP of \$400, which makes it one of the most expensive garage-door openers that is on the market. It's uncertain whether Chamberlain, Liftmaster or other manufacturers will follow suit by selling the fingerprint-control remote standard with a garage-door opener.

Craftsman allows storage of the fingerprints of up to four people; Liftmaster and Chamberlain remotes store up to 10. A device by Master Lock, which can be paired with any garage-door-opener brand, can store the fingerprints of up to 20 people. The i-touch by Xceltronix, which also works with all garage-door-opener brands, allows you to store up to 30. (The i-touch also incorporates a numeric-keypad entry system as well as a device that allows you to program the garage-door opener to automatically close in case that you forget.) You'll pay at least \$120 for a remote that will let you store the fingerprints of at least 20 people. (The i-touch device costs \$210.)



CHANGING GEARS. German manufacturer Sommer has introduced models that are mounted to the door and have a fixed-chain drive.

Unless you own a company that has a fleet of drivers for each vehicle, we can't imagine why you'd need to program fingerprints from more than four people into the remote.

EYE ON SAFETY. Meanwhile, time might be running out on your chance to buy a garage-door opener that doesn't require attaching laser safety sensors to the bottom of the door frame. Models that have only a built-in resistance

sensor that automatically stops or reverses the direction of the door were introduced 3 years ago. At press time, Martin was the only manufacturer that offered them.

Federal law mandates that all garage-door openers meet the requirements that are prescribed by Underwriters Laboratories (UL) for safety. And UL requires that Martin's garage-door openers that have only built-in resistance sensors be paired with garage doors that have a pinch-proof door design that prevents someone from reaching around and being pinched or grabbed by the door's hinged openings (an \$800 total cost).

Other manufacturers have garage-door openers that have similar versions of built-in resistance sensors, but because they also include the infrared safety sensors, those models can be paired with any garage door.

Antone Clark of Martin Door Manufacturing tells Consumers Digest that the two models that rely only on the resistance sensor for safety—the

more to get another model that has as good of a warranty on its 3/4-hp AC motor as the PD752D does. This model also is the least expensive model that we found that has two three-button remotes and 200-watt overhead lighting.

Features:

- * Motor: 3/4-hp AC
- * Remotes: 2 (3 buttons)
- * Light: 200 watts, incandescent
- * Warranty: Lifetime motor; 1 yr. parts

[E] *HomeLink*
MSRP: \$150; Best Price: \$239

>>This model is the least expensive DC-motor-powered unit that we found that is HomeLink-compatible. Its 5-year parts warranty is more than twice as long as that of any other garage-door opener that is in this price range.

Features:

- * Motor: 1/2-hp DC

- * Remote: 1 (3 buttons)
- * Light: 60 watts, incandescent
- * Warranty: 5 yrs. motor; 1 yr. parts

BELT-DRIVE GARAGE-DOOR OPENERS

[P] *HomeLink*
MSRP: \$346; Best Price: \$412

>>No other belt-drive model has a better warranty than the *HomeLink* does. This model also is the least expensive 1-hp garage-door opener that has both vacation mode, which allows you to disable remote access while you're away; and pet mode, which stops the door's descent at a height that allows pets to enter.

Features:

- * Motor: 1-hp DC
- * Remote: 1 (2 buttons)
- * Light: 120 watts, incandescent
- * Warranty: Lifetime motor, parts

[M] *HomeLink*
MSRP: \$259; Best Price: \$232

>>The *HomeLink* is the least expensive belt-drive model that has a 3/4-hp DC motor, a keyless entry system and a battery backup as standard features. We wish that this model's warranty matched the lifetime belt coverage that the six other models that are in this price range have.

Features:

- * Motor: 3/4-hp DC
- * Remote: 2 (3 buttons)

- * Light: 200 watts, incandescent
- * Warranty: Lifetime motor; 10 yrs. belt; 1 yr. parts

[E] *HomeLink*
MSRP: \$190; Best Price: \$255

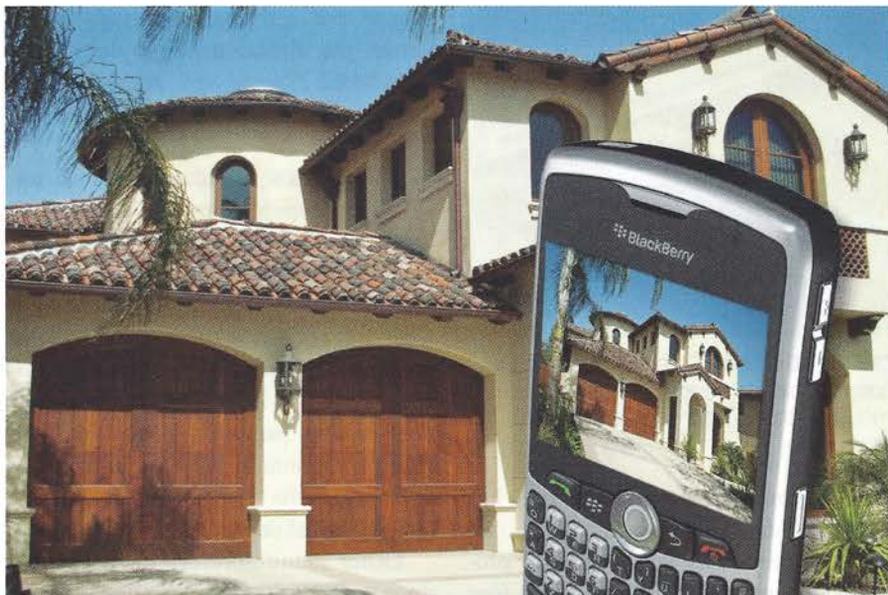
>>This model is the least expensive belt-drive unit that is on the market. You'd have to pay at least \$35 more for another belt-drive garage-door opener that has a 1/2-hp DC motor and a soft-start feature, which creates less wear and tear on the motor, because the motor starts gradually instead of jerking suddenly.

Features:

- * Motor: 1/2-hp DC
- * Remote: 1 (3 buttons)
- * Light: 60 watts, incandescent
- * Warranty: 5 yrs. motor; 1 yr. parts

For more information on the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers of the products directly. See page 64.





Wrong Number: Cellphone-Based Remotes Too Costly

At a time when 91 percent of Americans have a cellphone, it's no surprise that aftermarket manufacturers have made it possible for you to open and close your garage door by using your phone. But it's unclear exactly when garage-door-opener manufacturers will introduce their own smartphone-based technologies.

At least one garage-door-opener manufacturer appears to be working on smartphone-control capabilities, but the company was tight-lipped about its technology, so we have no idea about what it's working on (we'd guess a smartphone app) or whether it'll take more than a year or two to arrive. For now, you're left to troll for high-priced aftermarket options if you want to open your door by using a cellphone.

For instance, BlueGuard from EMX Industries is the only Bluetooth remote-control system that we found for garage doors. It was introduced in April 2009, and you can pair it with any Bluetooth-enabled cellphone or vehicle and use it with any garage-door opener. But at \$200, it's a lot to pay for a device that is appealing only because you can program it to automatically open your door as you approach (assuming that you have your cellphone with you or that your vehicle has Bluetooth).

Other cellphone-based garage-door-opener control systems that we found require you to call a free number to open the door. The upside to these call-based systems (of which we found three) is that you can close the door from anywhere in the country, which is a nice safeguard to have if you're on the road and you realize that you forgot to close the door. The downside to call-based systems is price: They range from \$489 to \$600, which is more than you'll pay for even the most expensive of garage-door openers (including installation).

In other words, if you want to phone it in, it's probably best to wait until garage-door-opener manufacturers develop less expensive options that work automatically with the opener.

DC2500e-O and DC3700e-O—could disappear from the market “in a couple of years” because of what appears to be an industry tug-of-war over the technology. Clark says there's a good chance that Congress will ban garage-door openers that don't have infrared

safety sensors. Industry rival Chamberlain has lobbied to prohibit garage-door openers that don't have infrared safety sensors since those types of openers arrived in 2007.

We found no independent safety concerns that are related to the two

Martin models, and UL officials tell Consumers Digest that they are unaware of any pending changes from government safety officials that would prevent Martin from offering the two models. In other words, we have no qualms about the safety or the operation of openers that don't have infrared safety sensors.

Nonetheless, there's no disadvantage to having a garage-door opener that has infrared safety sensors. They don't add to the cost of the opener, because they're standard on so many models, and they provide an additional level of safety. What's worth noting is that these sensors can be troublesome if they aren't securely fastened and aligned, which happens sporadically, experts tell us.

DRIVE TIME. Unlike all other manufacturers whose garage-door-opener motors remain stationary and are mounted to the ceiling or wall, three models from Germany-based Sommer raise and lower the door by using a motor that runs along a fixed chain. Sommer calls these models “door-mounted” openers, although only the motor—not the power head—is mounted to the door. You might also see them referred to as “direct drive.” Sommer began national distribution of these models last September.

The company says the benefit of this drive system is that it eliminates potential rattling noises that come from the chain movement as the door opens. Other manufacturers that we interviewed agree that the direct-drive system delivers what Sommer promises. The least expensive Sommer model, the Direct Drive (\$228), is a do-it-yourself model. You'll pay at least \$399 for one of the other two models that require professional installation (which typically costs from \$80 to \$150).

No other manufacturers indicated to us that they'll make direct-drive models. So the likelihood that the direct-drive market for garage-door openers will expand is, well, remote. ■

Drew Vass has covered the door and window industry as an editor and writer at several magazines, including Shelter and Door and Window Manufacturer.