

ESSE Electric Range Cooker performance and cooking report



Prepared by CAROL BOWEN

We asked Carol Bowen to put an Electric ESSE through it's paces, and prepare this report.

We hope it will give you an insight into living with an ESSE range cooker. We are pleased that Carol has also chosen an ESSE for her personal use and her appraisal of the cooker in both performance and quality we hope will be valuable in helping you make that final decision to purchase an ESSE range cooker.

RANGE COOKER TESTED

The ESSE Electric Range Cooker

Jet Black finish (Without optional central heating boiler)

TESTED BY CAROL BOWEN

Carol is a freelance cookery writer, food consultant and broadcaster, she contributes regularly to many national magazines, radio and television programmes. To date she has written over 70 cookery books and has won many awards.

OBJECTIVES

1. To put the cooker through a large number of domestic tests and tasks and rate its performance against other range cookers.
2. To give an unbiased and critical appraisal of the cooker.

1

Delivery and Installation

The cooker was delivered promptly and efficiently by ESSE and only required an electric power supply for immediate installation. Since this was being installed into an area that already had an adjacent power supply this was achieved in minutes with the aid of a competent electrician.

Having had an Aga in the past, I was delighted that the cooker arrived ready-assembled, did not require a special plinth, did not require a lengthy pre-heating time before cooking could commence and did not require any special ducting.

I chose to site my ESSE on a wall but recognise that I can place it almost

anywhere in my kitchen. Since I have an “unfitted kitchen” with freestanding units this is most attractive - I can change the siting of my cooker and kitchen according to my own needs and whims. I’m looking forward in the future, when there aren’t so many young mouths to feed, to installing my ESSE in a central ‘island’ feature and dispensing with my large kitchen table.

My ESSE was installed in a ground floor kitchen and so weight considerations did not play a part in its siting. Since it can be moved, albeit not on your own, but possible with two strong men, I expect that it could be installed in first floor or flat type

situations without the need for additional floor strengthening. An adequate lift would be a bonus however to lift 200kg of cooker!

The cooker arrived with grill pan, grill pan handle, roasting tray, 2 oven shelves, 1 oven/grill shelf and a plate rack. Other items included the Electric ESSE Guide, ESSE apron, ESSE oven gloves, set of cookery cards and touch-up paint. The package also included a commissioning card to return so that the cooker could be placed under warranty. I understand that other owners would also receive a copy of my Country Range Cookbook.

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Getting Started

I was pleased to note that the cooker guide was brief and succinct. It was sufficiently user friendly that I read the whole thing in a matter of minutes. I positioned the accessories where I thought they should go, donned my apron and gloves (very smart and a wonderful unexpected bonus) and prepared to make a start.

The instruction booklet clearly and concisely explained the oven and hob controls and I had no difficulty

understanding and using them.

I also followed the instructions to heat the bottom and top ovens for 1 hour to burn off any initial odours. It didn't therefore take me long to get started with cooking on the hob and in the two ovens. It could be said that I am an experienced range cook and would get to grip with the controls on this cooker but my family also easily mastered the controls within a short period of time.

The only time I came unstuck was

when I went to use the grill for the first time. I could not fathom how the grill shelf and grill pan, along with handle, worked together. I didn't notice that one of the three shelves was different and had installed one of the plain shelves in the top part of my top oven, but a quick call to ESSE's customer services department soon put me right.

3

The Testing

3.1 HOW I TESTED THE ESSE ELECTRIC COOKER

I measured the accuracy of the thermostat within each oven and also checked temperatures achieved while the ovens were on at the same time.

I measured the time it took to heat the ovens to varying temperatures to see if they compared favourably with other cookers and endorsed the claims made by ESSE for heat up times.

I cooked a very wide variety of food, including a full roast dinner; selection of cakes, breads and pastries; pizzas; boiled and baked vegetables (including jacket potatoes); fish and seafood; preserves; rice and pasta dishes; poultry and game as well as a full English breakfast for a crowd, using both ovens and the hob. This enabled me to check the cookers performance at various temperatures, with different loads or quantities of ingredients, evenness of cooking and/or browning, moisture loss and general prowess when compared with other range cookers.

I specifically batch tested cup cakes in both the top and bottom oven to check for even cooking and browning.

I also toasted bread to check the size of the grilling area and how quickly and evenly the grill browns. I then tested a number of thicker items like chops and steaks to see how well heat penetrates thicker foods.

Boiling speed and hob controllability were also monitored.

General notes on performance, ease of use, cleaning and design features were also taken into account to give an overall view on how the ESSE Electric performed.

Note:

Many of the cooking tests and results are non-standardised and subjective but are very similar to those that *The Good Housekeeping Institute* use when testing cookers for their magazine reports. I worked for Good Housekeeping in both the cookery department and the institute and these tests gave a reliable indicator of how the cooker would perform under domestic cooking conditions.

The temperature tests are similar although a little cruder than those used at The Consumer Association for compiling 'Which' reports. Variations from the control setting to within 25°C are generally regarded as good for free standing & built in cookers. The ESSE performed extremely well with very accurate top ovens and the bottom performing well for a true range cooker.

4.1 ACCURACY OF THE THERMOSTATS AND TEMPERATURE ACHIEVED

TOP OVEN

The temperature of the top oven was checked using a Brannan Dial Oven Thermometer which was placed in the centre of the shelf in the middle of the oven. The shelf was placed on the 4th set of runners from the bottom and the thermometer was placed halfway back in the middle to give as central a position as possible. No trays etc. were in the oven at the time of heating. The oven was tested from cold and no other oven or hotplates were in use during the testing time. The door was only opened once - when the thermostat light went out and the temperature was recorded. The kitchen temperature at the time of testing was 18°C.

DIAL SET AT ON HOB CONTROL	THERMOMETER READING	ESSE DOOR THERMOMETER READING	TIME TAKEN FOR LIGHT TO GO OUT
100	98C/200F	-	6 MINUTES
140	130C/255F	JUST BEFORE COOL	10 MINUTES
160	155C/310F	IN FIRST 1/3 OF COOL	13 MINUTES
180	175C/350F	IN LAST 1/3 OF COOL	16 MINUTES
200	200C/400F	LOWER HALF OF MODERATE	19 MINUTES
220	225C/440F	JUST IN HOT	23 MINUTES
240	250C/480F	TOP PART OF HOT	28 MINUTES
FULL EXTENT	260C/500F	JUST IN V.HOT	32 MINUTES

BOTTOM OVEN

The temperature of the bottom oven was also checked using a Brannan Dial Oven Thermometer which was placed in the centre of the shelf in the middle of the oven. The shelf was placed on the middle set of runners and the thermometer was placed halfway back in the middle to give as central a

position as possible. No trays etc. were in the oven at the time of heating. The oven was tested from cold and no other oven or hotplates were in use during the testing time. The door was only opened once - when the thermostat light went out and the temperature was recorded. The kitchen

temperature at the time of testing was 18°C.

These temperature tests were repeated 5 times for each oven over a period of 2 weeks and the results above are a good general indicator of the temperatures and timings recorded.

DIAL SET AT ON HOB CONTROL	THERMOMETER READING	TIME TAKEN FOR LIGHT TO GO OUT
50	NOT POSSIBLE	2 MINUTES
100	75C/150F	6 MINUTES
150	165C/325F	14 MINUTES
200	230C/450F	25 MINUTES
FULL EXTENT	250C/475F	30 MINUTES

> CONCLUSIONS

I found that my ESSE Electric cooker heated up much faster than the times indicated in the handbook - on average about 7 minutes faster per control reading in the top oven and roughly 4-5 minutes faster in the bottom oven. I saw this as a positive bonus and was surprised at its quick heating potential. With ovens that respond and heat so quickly there is little benefit from having a cooker where the oven is on all of the time (unless it is used for room or water heating purposes), for most moderate cooking.

4.2 ACCURACY OF THE THERMOSTATS AND TEMPERATURE ACHIEVED WHEN BOTH OVENS ARE USED TOGETHER

This test was developed to check whether the accuracy of the thermostat was impaired when both ovens were in operation. It is a frequent criticism of 'double oven' set ups that using both at the same time can affect the accuracy in one or both ovens to a large extent.

TOP OVEN SET AT	BOTTOM OVEN SET AT	THERMOMETER READING TOP	THERMOMETER READING BOTTOM	TIME TAKEN TOP	TIME TAKEN BOTTOM
100	50	90C/185F	75C/150F	6 mins	2 mins
160	100	150C/300F	75C/150F	13 mins	5 mins
200	150	200C/400F	130C/260F	20 mins	10mins
240	200	250C/480F	190C/375F	28 mins	15mins
FULL EXTENT	FULL EXTENT	260C/500F	220C/425F	32 mins	18 mins

> CONCLUSIONS

The top oven did not seem affected in terms of heating times when the bottom oven was also being used. The bottom oven did however heat up faster when the top oven was being used. I see this as a bonus providing the bottom oven does not overheat in the presence of the top oven. I'm pleased to report it didn't and the bottom oven thermostat kept the temperature well within the normal range of fluctuation. This is most essential for normal cooking practices since it means the top oven or bottom oven can be used totally independently for different cooking times and methods - especially useful when cooking a meal with a number of foods that require different cooking times, temperatures and treatments, for example when cooking a full roast dinner.

4.3 EFFECT OF HIGH TEMPERATURE IN THE TOP OVEN ON THE CONTROLS AND TEMPERATURE IN THE BOTTOM

This was a test to see if a high temperature in the top oven would raise the temperature in the bottom oven - a test really to see if heat transfer would be detrimental. Temperatures were recorded in the top and bottom oven when they had reached their chosen temperatures, then again after 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour and 11.5 hours.

THE TOP OVEN WAS SET AT 200°C AND THE BOTTOM OVEN WAS SET AT 150°C. THE OVENS WERE BROUGHT UP TO TEMPERATURE AND THEN TESTED AFTER THE INTERVALS STATED.

> RESULTS

	RECORDED TEMP TOP OVEN	RECORDED TEMP BOTTOM OVEN
After 15 minutes	225C/420F	155C/310F
After 30 minutes	225C/420F	150C/300F
After 1 hour	225C/420F	130C/255F
After 1.5 hours	225C/420F	125C/250F

> CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to what I expected the bottom oven did not increase in temperature but did seem to lose heat at the expense of the larger top oven. However since this was still within a 25°C range I don't think it gives cause for alarm. The ESSE still provides good, even cooking results and does not dip, dive or soar unduly during its heating and cooking process - a real plus over other range cookers.

4.4 BATCH BAKING OF CUP CAKES TO TEST EVEN COOKING AND BROWNING OF OVENS

This test involves preparing a basic sponge cake mixture (125 g/4oz self-raising flour, 125 g/4 oz caster sugar, 125 g/4 oz softened butter or margarine and 2 eggs), spooning into a 12 hole bun tray (lined with bun papers) and baking at 190°C/375°F for 12 minutes until cooked. The cup cakes are then assessed for degree of rising and degree of browning. The test was performed on both the top and

bottom ovens since it is essential that the bottom oven is not just thought of as a second simmering or adjunct oven to the top one, but an oven in its own right.

The tray of cup cakes were placed on a shelf on the 5th set of runners from the bottom in the case of the top oven and on the middle set of runners in the bottom oven.

> CONCLUSIONS

The cup cakes in both ovens rose evenly and produced good results. In all cases the back three buns coloured or browned slightly more than the remaining or front nine but not unduly so. The very darkest bun was the one positioned at the back left hand corner but this was not over-browned and the results in both ovens were pleasing.

4.5 TESTING THE GRILL

Here I toasted ordinary sliced bread to check the size of the grilling area and to see how quickly and evenly the grill browned the toast. I used 6 slices of small 'square' sliced bread.

> CONCLUSIONS

In most cases the four pieces of toast towards the back of the oven browned more evenly than the two nearest the door. If I positioned the slices further back on the grill rack then the back two did not brown as evenly as the front four. There appears to be a central area of the grill extending to 21 cm across and 28 cm in depth to the back of the oven that is ideal for even cooking and browning.

As I have stated before I found the grill a little slow to heat to a high temperature but when achieved, it gave good results. I still feel the grill is an added bonus to the Electric ESSE since it is the only true range cooker with an integral grill.

4.6 TESTING THE HOB

The hob was tested to see how quickly it would bring water to the boil. A single pan containing 600 ml/1 pint cold water was heated using the small centre section of the hob and the time recorded. Three pans, each containing 600 ml/1 pint cold water were then heated using the third position or entire hob area and the time noted. An electric kettle was also heated

with the same amount of water and brought to the boil for comparison purposes.

KETTLE TIME	2 MINUTES
1 PAN	7 MINUTES
3 PANS	9 MINUTES

> CONCLUSIONS

The hob is certainly speedy and providing that the correct pans are used, heats quickly and evenly.

4.7 WARMING CUPBOARD

I was pleased to see a warming cupboard and delighted with the plate rack that neatly sits inside. I have also used it for keeping food warm when cooked since it retains the heat from the two adjacent ovens for quite some time after they have been switched off.

However, on some occasions I have placed serving plates in the warming cupboard at the start of cooking (especially a roast dinner) and they have often been sitting there for some 2 hours and when removed are incredibly hot! And I advise you to use oven gloves.

NOTE: I don't think I have explored the full potential of the warming cupboard as yet. I would like to test it to make pot pourri, dried flowers and herbs etc.

Over a 6-8 week period I have cooked a vast range of dishes on and in the ESSE Electric to check the cooker's performance at various temperatures, with different loads, and using differing cooking methods to check its ability for the domestic cook.

The following food groups and dishes were tested and noted:

FULL ENGLISH BREAKFAST

This was tested using the grill and hob in tandem and also just using the top oven alone for a baked full breakfast. Both results were very pleasing and bacon, sausages, tomatoes all cooked evenly and in the case of bacon, crisply. The grill did seem slow to heat on occasions but gave good results and certainly it did not suffer from excess smoking, which has sometimes been the problem in the past with other cookers. The results from baking the breakfast in the oven were also very good but did take a little longer to produce - however this is the preferred method when cooking a full breakfast for a large crowd or more than 4-5 servings. Eggs were usually poached, scrambled or shallow fried on the hob, although I have had success by using Easy Glide directly on the hob when it is set to halfway or position 6.

FULL ROAST DINNER

I have cooked a full roast dinner countless times with meats as diverse as beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey and ham. Most were accompanied with potatoes of some description, usually roast or boiled, and a selection of vegetables. Yorkshire puddings were also cooked to accompany sometimes and there was always a gravy or sauce to serve with the main dish. On some occasions the oven was also used at the same time or just after the main cooking was over to cook or reheat a pudding. This is where the cooker really seemed to come into its own. It coped effortlessly with large quantities, the two ovens enabled the varying components to be cooked accurately and the spacious configuration of the hob enabled up to 6 saucepans to be positioned and heated at the same time.

I miss a hotplate to keep dishes warm after cooking but for the last couple of testing times I have placed a metal cooling rack over the top of the hob and kept the two hob rings heated on low to keep food warm with good results. I am hoping that the new 'companion', which will be available shortly, will have a flat surface suitable for placing dishes and plates on to keep warm

PASTA AND RICE DISHES

Rice and pasta were cooked plainly on the hob and also in the oven with excellent results. The flexibility and control of the hob was perfect for the rapid heating of the cooking water and then lowering for good 'al dente' pasta or fluffy rice results. The hob was very responsive to turning up and down so that there was no boiling over and certainly no need to 'slide' or reposition pans, as on other true range cookers. Baked pasta and rice dishes such as lasagne, rice pudding, cannelloni etc. were also cooked with good results. I also found the hob controls perfect for producing a classical creamy risotto.

BAKING

I've long suspected that those who buy a true range cooker love to cook and baking is part of their basic repertoire of family favourites. It is essential therefore, that the ovens should cook a vast array of bakery items with success. Over the weeks I have cooked sponge cakes, large and small that require short but high cooking temperatures; fruit cakes and tea breads that require a slower, gentler baking temperature; pastries and pies that require moderate temperatures; meringues that must have a low enough temperature to stay white

but enough to cook; and biscuits that will crisp and brown evenly whatever their composition and cooking temperature. The ESSE Electric made light work of them all. I used both ovens and chose the one most suitable at the time - opting for the larger oven for large quantities and usually the lower oven for low temperature items or those with a lengthy cooking time. (Not because it is inferior in any way but it simply kept the top oven free for cooking other items). Both ovens worked well, although the top oven sometimes cooked a little faster than the bottom in the low to moderate cooking range but not so much as to cause concern.

CHOPS, STEAKS ETC

These have been cooked on the hob, in the ovens and also under the grill. All gave good results. The grill often seemed slow to heat compared to my previous electric and gas grills and I imagined that it might give me problems with grilling items to 'rare'. This wasn't the case and steaks of 2cm thickness and above could be cooked so that the outside was brown and crisp and the inside rare and juicy - a triumph. I also baked marinated chops in the top of the top oven at a high temperature and achieved excellent results. The hobs also heated frying pans to a good high temperature for frying steaks, chops, chicken fillets etc. The hob was also good for sautéing meat and poultry.

FRYING AND POACHING

A large selection of dishes have been tried from the simple poached egg to the more exotic whole poached sea bass; and the shallow fried french toast to the deep fried beignets. Again the flexibility of the controls ensured success. I have always been very reluctant to deep fry on the hob of a true range style cooker - sliding pans of hot oil around to get just the right degree of cooking is, for me, a recipe for disaster. The ESSE hob controls however, are flexible and responsive enough to deem this unnecessary.

STEWES AND CASSEROLES

Perfection! Whether I chose to cook a stew or casserole from scratch first on the hob then in the oven fairly quickly at a moderate temperature; or put a long-standing family favourite in the oven at a low temperature for hours on end the results were tender, succulent and aromatic. I often used the bottom oven for this since a large casserole sits snugly on the bottom set of runners leaving the top oven for cooking any accompaniments at a later stage. On one occasion I batch cooked 6 medium casseroles using both the top and bottom ovens to their full capacity. Cooking times were not impaired even though this was a very large load and the results were very acceptable.

Soups could also be loosely placed in this category and I have made quite a few good soups on the hob and a wonderful French Onion Soup with cheesy crouton floats in the oven.

SAUCES AND GRAVIES

I have been able to cook a large variety of sauces with pleasing results. Many were standard white and flavoured sauces but others were very temperature sensitive like hollandaise and egg custard. The ability of the hob to cook evenly at low temperatures and in a gentle enough fashion ensured success for these latter recipes.

JACKET POTATOES AND OTHER BAKED VEGETABLES

I had sorely missed a range style jacket potato always saying there wasn't anything else to compare one to. The ESSE Electric didn't let me down and within 1 hour I had a crisply baked jacket potato with fluffy flesh. I have also enjoyed stuffed and baked onions, stuffed peppers, baked garlic (wonderful for spreading on fresh bread), butter drizzled and baked mushrooms of dinner plate size and baked or roasted mixed vegetable concoctions on either the winter or summer theme.

QUICHES AND FLANS

I had hoped to cook a quiche or flan on the oven floor thereby dispensing with the need to bake the pastry case 'blind' before adding the filling. However, I noticed in the handbook that it states "Food or utensils should not be placed on the base of the oven, as it gets very hot", so I didn't try it - but I expect it would work! I did try a conventional recipe for a quiche with all the tedium of baking blind etc. and it worked well.

STIR-FRYING

I did stir-fry several meat and vegetable mixtures using a deep frying pan but my wok cannot be used on a ceramic surface. I know there are woks available for use on ceramic hobs and have little doubt that the Esse Electric hob would be able to cope easily with the high temperatures and wide surface area required for wok style cooking.

PRESERVING

For the last couple of weeks I have been busy bottling fruit and making countless preserves from my kitchen and fruit garden. The large and deep top oven has proved indispensable for large clip-top Kilner jars and the bottom oven easily holds three trays of fruit rings for drying. Whether I needed a high hob temperature to bring chutney ingredients to the boil, a moderate temperature for bottling pears in the oven or a low and steady even temperature for drying apple slices, the ESSE coped magnificently.

TOAST

I do have an independent toaster so rarely would use the grill for toasting although I know it gives adequate results (see Testing the Grill results below). I did try my old hinged Aga Toaster on the hob and it worked well.

5.1 CLEANING

I have followed all the guidelines in the handbook about cleaning and the results are good.

COOKERY BOOK:

In general my existing COUNTRY RANGE COOKBOOK is a good companion for the ESSE ELECTRIC COOKER if the Thermodial Model Instructions are followed.



THE AUTHENTIC ORIGINAL

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