

Chicken Soup for the Stands

SO YOU'VE BARELY recovered from your holiday weekend at the beach. How about bracing for a chilly Sunday shivering in the stands?

With football season starting this weekend, cold weather isn't far behind. While you can start shopping for sweaters and long underwear for those game-day expeditions, gridiron fans know that true warmth comes from within. It's time, in other words, to think about how you're going to get soup and coffee to the big game.

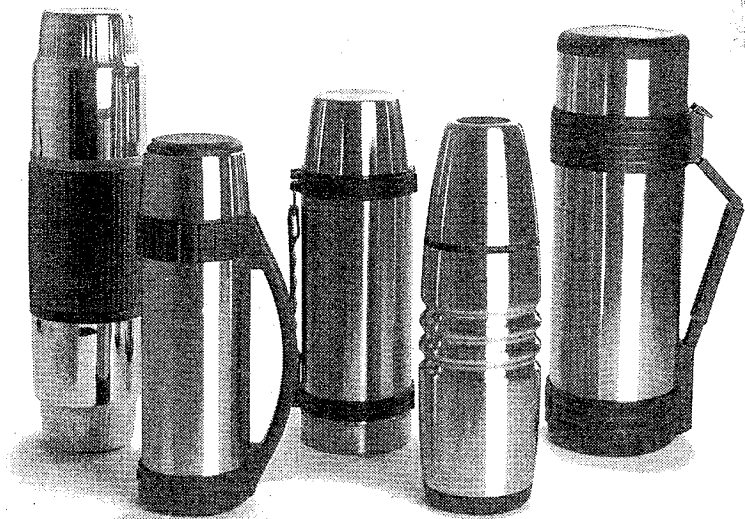
We had no idea just how many options there were. In contrast to the utilitarian thermal bottles of yesteryear—Thermos, incidentally, is a brand name—today's models come in all shapes and styles. We found everything from wired models that plug into your car's cigarette lighter to double-chambered numbers that hold two drinks at once. But the common theme is heat, with merchants promising that your beverage of choice will stay nearly as scalding as it was when it left your kitchen. "You'll never have that awful mouthful of cold coffee again," declared one merchant.

So we ordered five bottles, boiled up a big pot of chicken soup and tried to replicate game-day conditions by sticking our filled containers in the fridge (temperature: 38 degrees Fahrenheit) for four hours. Then we brought out the thermometer.

It didn't take long for a couple of our merchants to fumble the ball. We had high hopes for the bottle sold by Indoors & Outdoors because of its special feature—a 12-volt car cord so the liquid stays hot during the drive to the stadium. But once out of the car, this one drew a penalty flag: Our soup checked in at a lukewarm 129 degrees going from auto to fridge in the test.

B&L Beverage Café offered a model with a different twist: Its Trudeau Duo is two containers in one, with separate 17-ounce bottles connected end to end. That offers you the advantage of having more than one beverage on hand—so long as you don't mind that neither will stay piping hot. Our temperature reading (averaged between the two bottles): 153 degrees, about as warm as a cup of coffee from a fast-food joint in these litigation-conscious times, but probably not hot enough to thaw a Packers fan in December.

Our three remaining finds, however, delivered the heat—and then some. Each kept our soup at a blistering 179 degrees or higher, demanding care and precaution when we poured. But they also impressed by merit of their features. Target's miGo vacuum bottle had a stylish, space-age look and a nicely designed spout that lets you sip the beverage directly without pouring it into a cup (although one was provided, as with all the other models we



Sleek storage (left to right): Trudeau Duo from B&L Beverage Café; Zojirushi vacuum bottle from Amazon.com; 12-volt thermal bottle from Indoors & Outdoors; miGo from Target; and Best Family-Size Thermos from The American Tailgater.

tested). Amazon.com's Zojirushi one-quart bottle won points for its sheer lightness and sturdy handle—this is the bottle we'd most likely use for day-to-day commuting.

But our Best Overall selection seemed tailor-made for the gridiron crowd, so it's no surprise that it was featured in a catalog that caters to this niche market. From The American Tailgater, the Best Family-Size Thermos—a product that's indeed made by Ther-

mos (now owned by Nissan)—proved itself the Super Bowl champ of thermal bottles. For starters, it's the largest of the models we tested, a two-quart behemoth that can supply soup to a small army. But even better, it offers the most insulation—after four hours in the fridge, our soup still registered at a polar ice cap-melting 188 degrees. At that temperature, after one sip we're bound to feel as if we're in an indoor stadium.

—Charles Passy

STORE/PRICE/PHONE	QUALITY	SHIPPING COST/TIME	RETURN POLICY	PHONE/WEB EXPERIENCE	COMMENTS
The American Tailgater The Best Family-Size Thermos (two-quart) \$59.95 888-215-1490 www.americantailgater.com	Best Overall. Think of this as the William "Refrigerator" Perry of thermal bottles—big, bulky and not too stylish, but boy, does it get the job done. It offers the most insulation, and it was the largest bottle we could find. Comes with a handle and shoulder strap.	\$14.93 for rush shipping in two days; our order arrived on time. Standard shipping would have cost \$4.81.	Must return within 30 days of delivery. You pay shipping, unless item is damaged or defective.	A breeze. Site was easy to navigate, and we got e-mail confirmations of our order and the shipping status.	True to its name, this catalog offers everything a tailgater could want, from grills to folding furniture. For a cheaper drink-tote, it also sells those old-fashioned plaid Thermoses, \$15.95. Our order came with a free beverage holder.
Amazon.com Zojirushi one-quart stainless steel Dura vacuum bottle \$39.99 www.amazon.com	Best Value. A lightweight thermal bottle that holds heat exceptionally well. Although it's designed more for the coffee-drinking commuter, it could easily pull double duty on game day. Comes with a sturdy handle and spout designed for spill-free pouring.	\$18.07 for rush shipping in two days; our order arrived on time. Standard shipping (three to seven business days) would have cost \$4.52.	Return, in new condition, within 30 days of receipt. You pay shipping, unless return is due to catalog error.	Trouble-free. We were e-mailed confirmations of our order and shipping status. The product and customer reviews were helpful.	Never a company to shy away from information overload, Amazon offered an entire history of Zojirushi, a Japanese outfit that dates to 1918 and also manufactures what the Web retailer calls "the world's most advanced rice cooker."
B&L Beverage Café Trudeau Duo (34-ounce) \$42.95 888-483-9860 www.blbeverage.com	Clever and attractive, with two 17-ounce containers joined end to end, each with an easy-pouring spout. (Please note: You can pour from only one end at a time. We just wish our soup had stayed a bit hotter.)	\$31.13 for rush shipping in two days; our order arrived on time. Standard shipping would have cost \$4.50.	Return for refund within 30 days with original pieces and packing (otherwise, company may charge restocking fee). You pay shipping unless item is defective.	Speedy. We received e-mail confirmations of our order and the shipping status.	A haven for coffee and tea lovers, this site has a variety of brewing appliances and gourmet gifts, including several products in the Trudeau line of thermal bottles (other models come with features such as translucent drinking cups).
Indoors & Outdoors 12-volt, 32-oz. thermal bottle (made by Road Pro), \$34.88 866-765-8115 www.indoorsandoutdoors.com	Disappointing. Our soup stayed relatively hot as long as the container was plugged into the car's cigarette lighter, but once unplugged, the heat escaped rapidly. Comes with handle.	\$35.94 for rush shipping in four days; our order arrived ahead of schedule. Standard shipping would have cost \$6.06.	Return unused within 15 days. Call catalog for return authorization; claims for damaged items must be made within five days. Restocking fee may apply.	Hassle-free. We received e-mail confirmations of our order and the shipping status.	When we called to say the bottle wouldn't retain heat, a catalog representative said the company hadn't actually tested the product. But he indicated it's designed more for truck drivers on the go than football fans at the game.
Target miGo vacuum bottle (one-liter) \$34.99 888-304-4000 www.target.com	Another solid performer—and a stylish bottle to boot. The spout was a plus—you can sip directly from it—but the lack of a handle was a big minus.	\$24.95 for rush shipping in two days; we got ours on time. Standard shipping (seven to 10 days) costs \$6.95.	A generous 90-day policy. You pay shipping or can return item to any Target store.	Very well-organized site. We received e-mail confirmations of our order and the shipping status.	Catalog also sells a miGo Travel Mug (16-ounce capacity) for \$17.99.