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Fast Food French Fries Taste Test Winner Gets an Asterisk

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McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Five Guys, and Checkers face off for the title of best fast food french fries. (Photo: ThinkStock)

“Would you like fries with that?”

There's a reason this is arguably the most recognizable phrase in fast food — it's the most tried and true side dish in the entire industry.

Think about it: After the hamburger, there isn't a fast food dish that has been more important to the growth of fast food culture in America. Could you imagine a world where French fries didn't exist? I can't and, quite frankly, I don't want to.

What's even better is the fact that there are so many different variations on the deep-fried spud: Crinkle-cut, curly, shoestring, steak, waffle. You name the dish, it's likely there's a variation of fry to go with it.

That's why I did my own fast food version of the Tour de France (Tour de French Fries, anyone?), trading miles for carbs, hills for chain restaurants, and donning the yellow jersey as I sampled offerings from Burger King, Checkers, Five Guys, McDonald's, Wendy's, and White Castle to determine which is the French fry king.

The parameters: I ordered a large fries at each location and sampled each with and without ketchup.



We were not loving McDonald's french fries. (Photo credit: Anthony Sulla-Heffinger.)

McDonald's

Price: \$2.82

Order time: One minute

Temperature: Warm

Review: I almost cannot believe that McDonald's is bringing up the rear when it comes to fries, but their offering was mediocre at best. In terms of size and amount of fries, McDonald's stacked up nicely to its competition and was the only restaurant that offered a shoestring cut, but that is about where the good things ended. While it's possible I received a bad batch, the fries themselves were just warm enough to pass as not being leftovers and were overall inconsistent. What I mean by inconsistent is that when I tasted a fry that was salted well enough, it was absolutely pristine, but otherwise the fries were lacking severely in the flavor department. The fries did have a decent crunch to them, and were improved drastically with ketchup, so it wasn't all bad, but the minor positives did not outweigh the poor temperature and lack of flavor overall.

Ranking: 6th



Burger King's fries were fine — just fine — which worked against them. (Photo credit: Anthony Sulla Heffinger.)

Burger King

Price: \$2.71

Order time: Less than one minute

Temperature: Hot

Review: There wasn't anything specific that Burger King's fries did that was wrong. In fact, it was quite the opposite — there wasn't anything bad that I could really point out at all. Burger King's fries had a good temperature, decent amount of salt, solid flavor, and nice crisp to them. Overall they were pretty satisfying (not to be confused with Burger King's [failed Satisfries experiment](#)). Burger King's fries were a tad thicker than McDonald's, resembling something more of a classic fry, but the amount you received with a large order was significantly less than the others. In addition to that, the fact that there were other restaurants that offered a higher-quality product in almost every department prevented Burger King from being ranked higher on this list. Also, Burger King's fries aren't even the best ones on their own menu. That honor belongs to the Chicken Fries, but there's a time and place for those. Burger King had a decent fry offering, but there wasn't a defining characteristic that made it stand out amongst its competitors, therefore it finishes just above McDonald's in this test.

Ranking: 5th



Wendy's fries were fresh but lacked flavor. (Photo: Anthony Sulla-Heffinger.)

Wendy's

Price: \$2.89

Order Time: One minute

Temperature: Hot

Review: Along with Five Guys, Wendy's fries stood out for their freshness, as they were the only other ones to have actual potato skin still attached to each fry. Wendy's revamped their French fries a few years ago, and the chain has benefitted from the move. Wendy's fries were thicker than McDonald's and Checkers, crunchier than Burger King and had a freshness that was matched only by Five Guys. Where Wendy's fell short was in the flavor department. While they weren't as bad as McDonald's, I would have preferred a tad more salt on their fries, just to make them stand out a little bit more among their competition. While eating them, I felt as if I needed to use ketchup to make them as good as they could be, which is something that I didn't have to do with the top three finishers on this list. Wendy's was very close to being the best in all of these categories, but in the end, missed too many marks.

Ranking: 4th



White Castle's fries were this close to ranking higher on the list in several categories. (Photo credit: Anthony Sulla-Heffinger)

White Castle

Price: \$3.15

Order time: Less than one minute

Temperature: Hot

Review: This is where the decisions became tough. White Castle was unique because it was the only restaurant to offer crinkle cut fries, which definitely worked in its favor. The crinkle cut allowed for the fries to have a perfect balance, being crispy on the outside and soft on the inside. In addition to a nearly perfect texture, White Castle's fries had a great flavor, excellent temperature and good amount of salt. There really wasn't anything I could fault White Castle for, except for the fact that they didn't have a fresh, authentic look and taste like the second place finisher on this list. Also, while the flavor was really good, it didn't hold a candle to the top-ranked fry. At this point, I was splitting hairs and the margin between finishing first and finishing third was very slim.

Ranking: 3rd



Five Guys was not the winner of this competition, much to our surprise. (Photo credit: Anthony Sulla-Heffinger)

Five Guys

Price: \$5.98

Order time: Two minutes

Temperature: Hot

Review: Five Guys had the freshest fries and looked as if they were cut straight from a potato and dropped into the fryer. In addition, Five Guys easily offered the most fries out of any of its competitors, albeit at a much higher price. The fries were not overly crispy, but they were loaded with flavor on their own, not needing to be overly salted like many of the other restaurants' offerings. While they were good on their own, Five Guys' fries were much better when paired with ketchup, mostly because they were served very hot. I can honestly say that Five Guys' fries would be the perfect companion with a burger or hot dog. Five Guys would have won, dominating in the freshness category and having great flavor, even with the somewhat outrageous price point.

Ranking: 2nd



Yes, Checkers won as the best french fry. But was it fair? (Photo credit: Anthony Sulla-Heffinger)

Checkers

Price: \$3.15

Order time: 10 minutes

Temperature: Hot

Review: Honestly, it wasn't exactly fair that Checkers was included in this competition, seeing as they are the only chain that has seasoned fries as its default offering (Five Guys offers Cajun fries in addition to their regular fries). The fact that Checkers is winning this contest is like Barry Bonds being called baseball's all-time home run king. Basically, Checkers serves fries that are on flavor steroids. That said, the same way Barry Bonds was allowed to play baseball, Checkers was allowed in this taste test. Despite the extremely long wait (which I received a complimentary apple pie for, which did not influence this ranking), Checkers' fries were the best of the bunch. Sporting an orange color and visible black pepper flakes, there was really no competition when it came to the flavor department. In addition to the great flavor, Checkers' fries were hot and crispy, earning them high marks in nearly every department and the top spot in our French fry taste test (with an asterisk).

Ranking: 1st *