

Paul Smith finds inner peace through **BT's Home Highway**. At least until the phone bill arrives.

I did it Highway



Finally! I've finally had one of my epiphanies. Those of you with far too much memory space to fill may recall last November's column, which ended with me going off to the launch of BT's Home Highway, the new service which converts

your existing analogue line into two analogue and two ISDN versions. I wrote that on 3rd September, and on that day BT promised to kit out a few of us journalists with this fancy new, fast system so that we could test out the Highway in our own homes.

And, you should really have better things on your mind than the recollection of a reference in the following month's article, where I predicted that I would soon be sampling the joys of both ISDN and ADSL, having contrived to marry myself into what, at the time, held itself to be within BT's West London ADSL trial area. It turns out, incidentally, that I was three blocks short — a matter of the greatest frustration. Legal advice also informs me that this is hardly grounds for divorce. So, I resigned myself to ISDN Day which would rank alongside Surround Sound Day and DVD Day as one of the great milestones in my (but, strangely, not our) life, a day of much merriment, joy and cabling. But it didn't come. There were delays and lost bits of paper and the need for approval from little-known bodies of murky standing. ISDN Day receded into an administrative smog.

And then finally, six whole months from launch day, ISDN Day was upon me. At 8:30, ISDN Day Man would turn up, cable for an hour and disappear, leaving me in technobliss. Of course, it didn't quite happen that way. Mr. IDM came, cabled, drilled, fiddled, left, returned and started again — for ten hours. It turns out that living near Olympia Exhibition Halls means that you run the risk of BT engineers secretly pulling out 'spare' cards down at the exchange to satisfy the temporary needs of exhibitors.

At any rate, Mr. IDM spent the whole time here, with an annoying person standing over his shoulder going 'Oh, yeah, and what's that bit for?' (who should have been going 'Well, you're spending so much time here, the least I can do is to ask your name'). Now he's gone, and ISDN is here. And it is a source of so much joy.

Of course, I had to kit myself out with tons of new stuff — which is A Good Thing in itself — mostly Netgear stuff from Bay Networks. It comes in nice boxes and adds to the general tone of celebration.

I started off with a terminal adapter, the ISDN equivalent of a modem. But, having more than one computer, I decided to delve further and learnt much about the arcane world of networking. I am now one of the Chosen Few who knows what a hub, a switch and a router do. Better still, I've installed all on my network of two PCs to save me from having to reach around to connect to the net.

An ISDN router, like the Netgear RT328 I've got here, is simply the coolest piece of kit since the 3Com Palm V. (I know it wasn't that long ago, but you know what I mean.) It lets all my computers connect to the net over ISDN using such coolnesses as bandwidth-on-demand, an everyday miracle which will start the second ISDN line if bandwidth remains over, say, 45K for five seconds, and drop it if it falls below, say, 30K for five seconds.

Here's why we all love ISDN: I love it because it's fast and connects in less than a second; Del loves it because

Edward loves ISDN because, frankly, HOW'S A CAT SUPPOSED TO GET ANY SLEEP with that noisy modem handshaking business going off in his ear every few minutes?

she can surf all the estate agent sites a lot quicker and because she hasn't yet seen the phone bill; Edward loves it because, frankly, how's a cat supposed to get any sleep with that noisy modem handshaking business going off in his ear every few minutes?

This telephone bill business is going to be a key factor, so I have decided to adopt a blind spot and learn never to think about it, otherwise it will become too depressing. What with that fast connection and British Telecom's indefensible — I know, I've asked them — five pence minimum call charge, you could easily rack up 50p a minute. Oh well, better get in some of those chocolates that Del likes before the bill arrives.

www.paulsmith.com