

## Pocket Surfer 2: Free mobile Internet, unbelievably fast

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In a hot, luxurious room last night, a gathering of media and business professionals were told the next generation of mobile Internet was here. It's called the Pocket Surfer 2 and it's made by a company called DataWind. Sceptical, we certainly were. DataWho? But we also spent the duration of the presentation with our eyebrows continually raising, mouths continually being drawn closer to the ground.

We used the Pocket Surfer 2 and it really is deeply impressive. Why? Because it offers completely free mobile Internet -- the full Internet -- at speeds faster than any **BlackBerry**, any **Nokia**, and even the allegedly omnipotent **Apple iPhone**, even though it uses GPRS, not 3G.

With a full-colour, 5-inch 640x240-pixel screen, it supports full HTML pages, JavaScript, frames (if you're 1999 enough to still use them), ActiveX control, Flash and Ajax. We saw it download a 2MB Adobe PDF file in less than seven seconds -- seriously, over GPRS. You can even download and open PowerPoint files, for crying out loud. As you can see, there's a full Qwerty keyboard, so Web mail and typing URLs is a cinch.

Before you go off your gadget-loving little nut -- or think it's too good to be true -- the Pocket Surfer has some drawbacks. We were sad to see YouTube videos don't play. This is probably to do with the limited processing power under the hood. You wouldn't be able to hear anything anyway, as there's no speakers or headphone socket -- which means no VoIP, of course.

It's going to launch at the start of August for £179.99 and that includes 20 hours a month for free, but hardcore users can pay £5.99 a month for completely unlimited usage. DataWind has some hefty bulk data deals with the network operators, and as an MVNO, it covers all the costs of your Internet browsing. There's no contract, no minimum usage period and no restriction on what you can browse. There are contextual ads on the built-in search, but you don't have to use it. Pretty sweet, huh? Click through for more info.

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We got our hands on this gadget and in all honesty, it's got ridiculous amounts of potential. All the pages we tried loading -- CNET.co.uk, CNN, Engadget, BBC, to name but a few -- loaded in mere seconds. DataWind has a sturdy stash of patents under its belt (14, actually) for technology that allows it to compress pages to a thirtieth of their original size, meaning lightning-fast downloads, even over GPRS.

For the true geeks among you, it does this by using its own servers as a proxy. Pages are requested through the proxy, compressed into minuscule sizes, then belted across the airwaves to your handset. The handset uses Internet Explorer as its base, so fully encrypted Web pages, such as your online banking stuff, are supported.

Online Web apps work fine, apparently. We're told Google's online document, spreadsheet and email apps work perfectly, although we didn't have enough time to try them out. IM is built in -- specific details on this are heading our way -- and the package comes with 25GB of online storage that gives you access to your personal documents on the move. This feature is required because there's no built-in storage for files -- it's a dedicated Internet gizmo, not a PDA. It does come with some remote PC control software, meaning your home or office PC is accessible through the Web. We didn't see this in action, sadly.

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The built-in battery will spit out 5 hours of continuous browsing, or 5 days on standby. It weighs 172g and is about as wide as an average hand.

While this is all very impressive, there are still some grey areas to dampen your spirits. We weren't told whether periodic updates for plugins, such as Flash, will be supported. We're also not sure whether favourites and history lists are supported, though a representative of DataWind confirms it's almost certain. We'll just have to wait until the final units ship.

But, if you fancy checking Facebook in a taxi, banking on the toilet, cruising CNET.co.uk while sky-diving or viewing porn in an ice-cream store for free, get your wallet out in August when the Pocket Surfer 2 comes out. As you might expect, we'll have a full review for you with all the details in a couple of weeks, so be sure to check back, Cravoids. -Nate Lanxon

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