

WESTERN SPIRAL ARM

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Pocketsurfer 2



Two weeks ago we travelled to New York for the launch of the iPhone.

The world's media looked-on as shoppers snapped-up the £300 device.

Crowds gathered on New York's 5th Avenue to watch the spectacle.

The launch of Datawind's Pocketsurfer 2 couldn't have been more different.

Sitting in a darkened room at the Canadian High Commission (don't ask), there was very little whooping and no-one camped out to be there... as far as I know.

However the product being launched was, in many ways, just as revolutionary.

In a nutshell Pocketsurfer 2 is a slimline, flip open web device.

It also supports instant messaging and e-mail.

Oh, and it's the fastest mobile web experience you'll find. Trust me, I've tried it.

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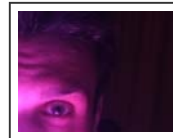
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My 3G handset took at least 6x longer to download a full web page. Even my HSDPA sim was left standing.

The amazing thing is, it's using GPRS - the apparently data outdated system.

The company's servers do some mysterious crunching at their end. The user sees apparently complete web pages.

Although sketchy on the details, I established that much superfluous HTML code is removed. What is sent out is effectively a totally interactive, full resolution image of the page.

The result - even massive PDF files can be 'downloaded' in seconds.

User experience is very slick and pages look great on the 640x240 screen.

Given the heavy criticism of the iPhone's edge system, I was left wondering why Apple hadn't implemented a similar technology.

Also interesting is the pricing.

£179 for the device and that's it.

Pocketsurfer 2 has a built-in data-only sim (Orange I believe... but again they seemed reluctant to discuss that).

The company covers your data costs up to 20 hours usage per week which is paid for through advertising on the sponsored homepage.

At the moment that applies to the first year of ownership - with a guaranteed £40 for subsequent years, although they're looking to eliminate that.

It also has built-in GPS. A fact that slipped out in later conversation. Talk about hiding your light under a bushel.

So it's a great device that works fantastically?

Well yes, for the most part.

However the pre-release machines we used seemed slightly ropey on build quality. Part of one was hanging off slightly.

The keyboard wasn't the most pleasant typing experience - it's a sectioned touch pad in the style of the Moto Razr.

There isn't an operating system as such, so don't expect to add on any fancy applications. Although the company is quite honest about this. They don't pretend that it's a PDA or smartphone.

And because it's not actually streaming large amounts of data the PS2 can't do web video.

But then the device itself is almost irrelevant. It's the use of GPRS that left most guests impressed.

Others companies have promised this sort of data compression, both on dial-up and mobile. Datawind seem to have cracked it.

As long as their server infrastructure keeps-up with user growth, they could be on to a winner.

Let's just hope those patents are watertight or Apple may pounce in an attempt to speed-up the dog slow iPhone.

POSTED BY W.S.A. AT 09:34

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