

WEEKEND FT

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now to spend it

JANUARY 2001

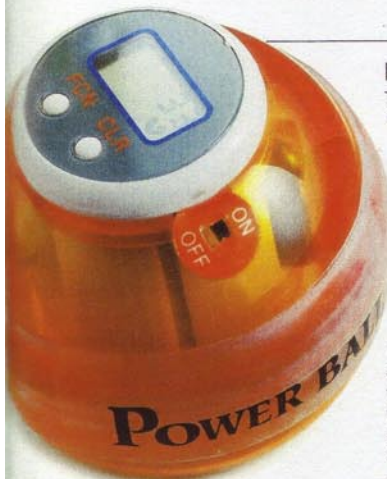


CATCHING THE DRIFT WHY TRAVELLERS ARE CAPTURED BY KERALA

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technopolis

Join gadgetologist Jonathan Margolis on a healthy New Year stroll down the highways and byways of Gizmo City.



POWERBALL

This wonder of Taiwanese technology is well on its way to becoming the Newton's Cradle/Rubik's Cube of 2001 in its appeal as a grown-up male toy. The Powerball is a plastic sphere containing a gyroscope and a mini-computer that shows how fast it's spinning. You set the gyro whirring gently by hand and then sort of whip the whole thing around. If you get it going bigtime, neon bulbs light up to prove your manhood. It is capable of exerting 23kg of force on your wrist, arm and shoulder, and is alleged to have added up to 20m to the drive of golf champion, Pádraig Harrington. If, like me, you've never been able to make a yo-yo do more than a solitary yo, you'll absolutely loathe the Powerball. If not, you won't put it down between now and the cricket season, for which you'll be very well prepared. £24.95, from www.firebox.com

TINNEX II

One of the benefits of club culture is that the young can now enjoy the delights of tinnitus, the ghostly ringing-in-the-head condition which, even before loud music became a youth rite of passage, was affecting an estimated 2.9m people in the UK. This Austrian invention, Tinnex, claims to be an electromagnetic cure for tinnitus. In an independent study at the Ludwig Holtzmann Institute for Biosensorics in Austria, it improved or cured 59 per cent of sufferers after a few weeks. My mother-in-law, at the Eastbourne Institute for Tea Making, achieved a nought per cent cure rate; indeed, she said it made her tinnitus worse. The makers insist that this means it's working, and that she should have persevered. I'd say Tinnex is worth a try on the grounds that nothing else even pretends to work. £251, for mail order call 01923-855 006



ELECTRIC TONGUE CLEANER

When I first advocated the old Indian bad-breath remedy of the tongue cleaner a few years ago, everyone laughed. The idea of scraping the accumulated gunge off your tongue strangely revolted people more than the existence of the gunge in the first place. Now, however, tongue scrapers are an acceptable weapon in the fight against Mr Germ – just in time for the Americans to effect this spectacularly over-the-top quantum leap in oral hygiene. The vibrating electric tongue scraper enables you to excise bacteria, plaque and food particles right to the back of your tongue – and without that unpleasant gagging feeling that manual devices give you. A precision piece of engineering it is not, but the Electric Tongue Cleaner certainly does its job remarkably well and it even includes a spare cleaning blade in the unlikely event of anyone wanting to borrow it. £19.99 from www.innovations.co.uk

TRAINAIR

So we're there. Unlike this time last year, it now really is the 21st century, and not even pedants can argue otherwise. And how do we feel? Almost certainly wrecked, just like the early days of January every year. That's why the Trainair is the technological assistant we need for the real new millennium. This all-British electronic box of tricks performs the not inconsiderable miracle of training you up to match fitness while you're comfortably seated in your armchair. Simply connect the apparatus to your PC, and it turns into a gym with built-in personal trainer, as used, so they say, by several rugby clubs and top-level swimmers.

The secret of the Trainair – the reason it is perfectly pukka fitness-wise even though you don't have to get up and jump about – is that it concentrates on teaching you how to maximise lung capacity and diaphragm strength. Power breathing, even though it sounds disconcertingly "alternative", is said to be the key not just to athletic prowess, but to concentrating and focusing at work, and to de-stressing. Apparently, breathing more efficiently does more than build up chest muscles. It also opens up new airways in the lungs. Swimmers have reported knocking fractions of seconds off their best times after using Trainair.

What you do with Trainair is take several sharp intakes of breath. This sounds easy enough, but you're doing it against a stiff resistance in the mouthpiece, and it is actually very exhausting. The system takes you through a two-month training programme of three half-hour sessions a week, tracking your progress from session to session, so you can see your breathing fitness develop. The engagingly simple Trainair software is particularly clever; your breathing is represented as a hot air balloon travelling over a mountain range, and the only way to avoid doing a Branson on a sharp peak is to keep inhaling for all you're worth. I can also report that, just as it says in the accompanying brochure, you really do feel invigorated and kind of glowing, if wasted, after a session.

Once you're Trainair-trained, a session or so a week will keep your newly refurbished lungs up to scratch. Up to 20 people can be individually trained using the same system, and little cardboard disposable mouthpieces are supplied if you prefer not to be orally intimate with the other chaps in the XV.

£586; for mail order call 01322 332000, www.trainair.co.uk

SILLY STREET

Even if someone has the nerve to borrow your tongue cleaner (left), I can guarantee they'll draw the line at scrounging your excess nose hair trimmer. And this new model, the Turbo Groomer, is no ordinary nose hair trimmer, but a super-de-luxe version. It has a hidden blade mechanism to avoid those painful pinches, as well as a cunning integrated headlight which manages brilliantly to illuminate a spot somewhere on the outside of your nose, just when you're desperate for a bit of lighting to assist in providing the sublime relief of a comprehensive nasal mow. A great technological advance, nonetheless.

£14.99, from www.gifts4all.co.uk, or call 07041-372 170



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