

DIGITAL OR NOT?

A friend of mine called in a panic to say that he had received a formal communication from his local Trading Standards to remove the word 'digital' from his advertisement for the fitting of 'digital aerials'.

The model he fits is one that is benchmarked by the Confederation of Aerial Industries, who have a scheme to lay down minimum standards for the technical performance of UHF TV aerials based on the specific requirements for satisfactory DTT reception and publish the voluntary list.

If such an aerial is benchmarked then its design performance is specifically aimed at DTT reception with a balun and/or provision for an MRD (margin raising device) for active impulse noise reduction. So, can an aerial, for which the primary design and benchmarking is DTT reception, be called a digital aerial? There is no argument that it will satisfactorily receive analogue transmissions for which a Balun or an MRD are not essential requirements, although the construction or operation of the item itself is not 'digital'.

Trading Standards argue that it is for clarification purposes that they make the request so that customers are not confused. Let us not forget that FM aerials are now called 'DAB aerials' or audio headphones are described as 'digital headphones'.

I suppose that in any advertisement the text should read as 'benchmarked for CAI Standard 2 Digital Terrestrial Television reception aerials', but I think that 'digital' is more to the point as an adjective to describe the aerials primary design criteria. Obviously, Trading Standards do not agree. I wonder who advises them?

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LEGO'S INFLUENCE

It was fascinating to read of the link between toys and the engineering profession in *E&T* Vol 4 #3. From around 1947 onwards, my own progression included a 1930s electrical

construction kit inherited from an uncle, Meccano with two clockwork motors, a chemistry set, a Juneeero construction kit, and the Eagle comic with its exploded views of planes and so on. An EMI correspondence course on electronics at the age of about 13 culminated in the construction of a two-valve mains radio with 'reaction control'.

From all of this I graduated, with help from *Practical Wireless* and *Wireless World*, to experimenting with early Mullard transistors; transmitting very low-fi music optically (to an OCP 45) across the family living-room and building ever more complex transistor radios. How much of this qualifies as playing, I don't know, but it was all for fun and very much hands-on.

With a brilliant secondary school physics teacher, no wonder that an electrical engineering degree followed – including vacation working at AEI in Manchester and Northern Electric in Montreal – and a career which progressed via Ferranti Computers, GEC, robotics, the commercial field, university industrial liaison, and a strategic knowledge transfer role.

How can one tell whether the 'toys' stage led to the adult career or whether the choice of toys was simply a foretaste of my natural bent? Whichever it was, I have had fun for over 60 years.

Adrian Hill MIET
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I was passionate about Lego from an early age, but eschewed the bespoke models and preferred to make my own, which were usually aircraft, helicopters and spacecraft. Although my parents did not have much money, Christmas and birthdays often involved some contribution to an ever-expanding 'bin' of Lego pieces.

I am now a lecturer in the Structures Group at Cambridge University, where my own research specialism is in aerospace structures – hardly surprising. I can count the

influence of Lego upon shaping, not only my aspirations, but my interrogation and technical skills and the development of my creativity.

I've now encouraged my own five-year-old son to take an interest in Lego, too.

Keith Seffen

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BAD AD

I have been struck recently by an error in the latest British Gas advertisement that seeks to promote offshore wind farms.

A cartoon 'home planet' is shown being connected to a cartoon 'water planet' on which we see a wind farm. The problem is that the lead carrying the power from the turbines is fitted with a three-pin plug that is then seen to be connected to a socket at the home. This makes the wind farm appear to be an appliance powered by the home rather than vice versa.

Clearly, whoever designed the advertisement was not aware of IEE codes of practice and is presumably also oblivious of the danger posed by a plug with exposed contacts fitted to the supply side of the mains.

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RAILWAY REMINISCENCES

The article on Margate's scenic railway (Vol 4 #3) reminded me of the three months I spent as

a brakeman on 'The Scenic' in 1960, between leaving school and joining the RAF. Catching the rope on each of the two ascents was indeed tricky, and we took pride in making this as smooth as possible. My training consisted of two runs sitting behind the chargehand who showed me how to do it; then two runs with him behind and me doing it; and finally a solo run. That afternoon, 30 passengers were entrusted to my new-found skill.

Health'n'safety had not then been invented. There were no seatbelts, just a handrail for the passengers; and the brakeman sat on an old metal tractor seat between the first and second cars, with only the 3ft-long brake lever to hold on to. The chargehand would get very annoyed with those who would ride with just one hand on the brake (or occasionally none) in order to impress the screaming girls behind us.

It was a very enjoyable introduction to the world of work. Not many chartered engineers are able to claim that they have 'driven' a listed building.

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IT'S GOOD, BUT IS IT COACHING?

I have enjoyed reading Janet Wright's 'On the Coaching Couch' articles in *E&T* and on the IET website, but here is

