Our monthly dose of “patently obvious” and not-so-obvious mini-stories.

**e&tCetera...**

by Mike Barfield

**HERITAGE**

news from NaDir

The hot topic of conversation around the water cooler at the London base of NaDir is “wearable technology”. Opinion is polarised over the viability of Google’s recently-revealed spectacle-style Web browser, Google Glass.

Some say it is an exciting and inevitable development, which can only grow in popularity. Others say it is cumbersome, geekish and doomed to failure. This sharp division between optimism and pessimism among staff has been aptly summed up by one office wit as: ‘Google Glass half-full; Google Glass half-empty.’

With Google’s high-tech specs currently being refined before launching globally, NaDir’s own development team are in the lag phase to explore the wilder shores of wearable Web browsers. While Apple are rumoured to be working on a rival device in the form of a wristwatch, NaDir’s resolutely retro sensibilities have turned to an even earlier era and come up with the ‘phone-based pocketwatch’, or PhoBWatch, for short.

A non-functioning prototype has already been produced. It is in the form of an enlarged ‘hunter’ watch, in brushed aluminium, complete with a hinged lid and a waistcoat chain. It looks rather flash in a steampunk way, but the size is proving problematic. With an estimated retail cost of £499, it is as big as a Frisbee, meaning any prospective purchaser would not only need deep pockets, but wide ones too.

NaDir’s tentatively-titled HandBook looks rather more promising. This is, quite literally, a palm-computer. The backroom staff have clumsily grafted a micro-thin LCD touchscreen onto a neoprene glove. A flesh-coloured cable connects it to a microdrive tucked up your sleeve while the device is voice-controlled via a microphone in the screen.

As a result, users can invite people to ‘speak to the hand,’ and still be perfectly polite. However, being glove-based, early field trials have shown the HandBook suffers from one major flaw: it is far too easily left on a train. Less easy to overlook is NaDir’s Internet-ready raincoat. This has a hood with an inbuilt DVGA display and is really rather clever. In fact, the only thing holding it back is the lack of a decent moniker. If only Apple hadn’t already bagged the name ‘iMac’...

**Patently Obvious**

WIPO, the UN’s worldwide patent database, now has a smartphone version for busy inventors on the move. Of the eight million applications listed, only one of the three below was thrown up by the search terms, ‘sheep’s blood to a 15-year-old’, and accompanies the drawing shown. But which is it?

**a) Environmental Enrichment Tool**

A device for helping captive primates pass their time productively. Food is placed into the head of the ‘raddle’ (sic) and can only be retrieved by shaking, an action which ‘allows the primate to release some of its energy’, and can take up to 40 minutes.

**b) Simple Fly Trap**

A biodegradable cellulose flask with an impregnated odour attractive to flies. Flies entering the tubular opening fly upwards against the bowed end, seeking escape, and eventually die of exhaustion and/or dehydration. The whole apparatus can then be composted.

**c) Buoyant Shot Dispenser**

A pulbous receptacle made of a rigid, reusable material approved for food use. The bulb is filled with alcoholic spirit and inverted into a soft drink or other ‘gustable liquid’. It ‘allows the primate to release some of its energy’, and can take up to 40 minutes.

**Aacro-names**

A few issues back we asked you for brief summations of the life and achievements of the Serbian-American genius Nikola Tesla using the letters of his name as literary stepping stones. Despite a lurking ‘K’ – always an awkward initial in word games – many readers rose to the challenge.

Irene Jones penned a potted biography: ‘Noted Inventor; Kinsfolk Of Landlocked Austria. Transformer Engineer, Scientist, Legendary American,’ while Patrick Canton summed up Tesla’s role in what became known as the War of Currents between George Westinghouse (AC) and Thomas Edison (DC), viz ‘Notably Inspired, Knowing Of Lost Ampacity; That Edison’s System Lacked Advantages’.

Graham Kent came up with two suggestions which he described as ‘one serious and one flippan’: ‘1) Now Inputting Knowledgeable Observations, Located And Tested Electromagnetic Synchronised Lateral Arrays’; ‘2) Not In Knickers Or Lacy Apparel, Try Eating Spicy Laxatives – Alone!’ This is somewhat surreal, but probably good advice. Now, what can you make of the name of Francis Bacon (the 17th century polymath, not the flesh-obsessed portrait painter)?

Suggestions to etc@ mikebarfield.co.uk

**Times of the Month**

June’s most notable dates.

2nd: Marconi patents the radio in London in 1896, setting in train a series of amazing technological advances that will eventually culminate in the Archers Omnibus.

3rd: In 1789, James Cook observes the transit of Venus from Tahiti, thereby establishing the important scientific rule – still in force today – that British astronomers always ‘need’ to go somewhere hot and exotic to do their research.

4th: The birth of Socrates in 470BC, though the midwife complains of delays caused by the baby constantly questioning its position in the womb.

5th: The Apple II personal computer goes on sale in 1977 for a whopping $1,298, giving early adopters their first ever experience of feeling broke but smug.

15th: First human blood transfusion attempted in 1667 by Dr Jean-Baptiste Denys, who gives 12 fluid ounces of sheep’s blood to a 15-year-old boy. Asked how he feels afterwards, the patient replies, ‘Baa-d’.

22nd: 1633, and Galileo recants his view that the Sun is the Centre of the Universe. 480 years later, and Justin Bieber proves it is in fact him.

30th: The first ‘leap second’ was added to Coordinated Universal Time back in 1972, giving female computer scientists a tiny, momentary window to propose to male colleagues.

**PATENTLY OBVIOUS: The genuine patent was (a).**